

Music students do well by 'Jacques Brel'

by HELEN ZUCKER
The Oakland University Music Department production of "Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris" at the Studio Theatre is an evening of bittersweet songs sung by four lively performers.

Director Stephanie Rivers, the cast and crew handle Brel's "existential" lyrics with care.

By now, Brel's music, like Woody Allen movies, is an acquired taste. Like Allen, Brel deals in the age-old themes: Time, sex, death, aging; above all, love, requited and unrequited.

Brel, however, specializes in the

Review

poignant, the swift, skeptical nunces. His lyrics have a Gallic, tongue-in-cheek bounce. Everyone involved in the production understood Brel's music.

ALL FOUR members of the company have excellent diction. They don't lose a word while dancing or moving about the stage. The evening

is all clarity and verve.

Karl Schmidt has a powerhouse of a voice. His version of "Amsterdam" is one of the best numbers of the evening. His voice is so strong he seems to be holding resonance in reserve. It's not difficult to imagine Schmidt in a vast concert hall; the people in cheaper tiers would have no trouble hearing him.

He does well by "Alone" and "The Statue;" and in the ensemble numbers he manages to keep his great voice from overwhelming the others.

Ann Reeves is a talented singer. One of Brel's best songs, "My Death," was done with considerable beauty by Ms. Reeves. She has a plaintive, vulnerable quality that suits the lyrics. She sings with feeling; when she tells us "Death waits behind the door... but it's all

right as long as I have you," we believe her.

Ms. Reeves version of "Carousels," a moving song that uses amusement park rides as a metaphor for the world closing in, is beautifully articulated.

FLORA MCINTYRE has neat timing. She was charming as "Timid Frieda," "Kicky in the 'Brussels' number; and she gave a moving rendition of "Old Folks." The song was enhanced by a Brechtian use of powerful photos of old people shown on a movie screen behind the stage.

David Pfeiffer brought passion to his numbers, especially "Next." Brel's song about a young soldier's indistinctness to love, military-style, is a tough one to pull off. Pfeiffer creates the dramatic situation, but his mobile face gets in his way. He

brings high spirits to everything he does but needs to work on shadings, manner, half-tones.

I have nothing but praise for Risa Sears who handled acoustic and electric piano, Dan Derkacz working the synthesizers, Rod Welcho on percussion and Kirsten Alvin who did a wonderful job on the harp. Fine musicians all.

The small embellishments such as flowers during the "Funeral Tango," a red scarf waved by Pfeiffer during "The Bulls," suitcases carried by Ms. McIntyre during the "Timid Frieda" number, added to the bare set.

However, the last blowup of the globe spinning in space while the lights came up, as if we were all about to be transported into the celestial spheres, was not necessary. Thero-

ing finale, "If We Only Have Love," sung with terrific gusto by the entire company, can stand on its own.

THE GLOBE SPINNING against the singer's clothing was distracting. "Brel" ends on a high, affirmative note; anything extra is simply overkill.

Staging, pace, movement were all exceptionally good. Plain black outfits (topless) might have worked better as costumes. Though the songs were originally done in a cabaret, the night-clubby costumes seemed wrong or stage. Lighting by Stephen Thomas and Tom Ryan was very effective.

The Studio Theatre is located in Varner Hall on the campus of Oakland U. The show runs through Friday-Saturday.

P'Jazz brings Les McCann

P'Jazz at the Pontch continues its summer concert series with Les McCann on Monday and the Brookside Jazz Ensemble with Ursula Walker on Wednesday.

Both concerts will be held on the poolside terrace of the Hotel Pontchartrain in Detroit.

Les McCann's distinguished musical career goes back to the mid-'50s. He plays keyboards, composes and is considered a leading jazz innovator, incorporating elements of jazz, rock, pop and classical music into his stylings.

A native of Lexington, Ky., McCann began his career as a comedian/singer and appeared as such on the "Ed Sullivan Show."

Upon hearing an Erroll Garner record, McCann decided to become a jazz pianist, a move which has brought him world acclaim.

THE BROOKSIDE Jazz Ensemble took its name from the private Brookside School in Bloomfield Hills, in whose auditorium the group of local

musicians first held rehearsals in 1970. Most of the members hold other jobs, reserving evenings and weekends for their first love, the big band sounds which they have made popular once again around Detroit.

The Brookside Jazz Ensemble and its vocalist, Ursula Walker, have been favorites of P'Jazz audiences for several years.

The Les McCann concert will begin at 6:30 p.m. General admission tickets and reserved seats are available.

The Brookside Jazz Ensemble takes the P'Jazz stage at 6 p.m. Tickets are priced for general admission and for reserved seats.

A FEW RESERVED seat tickets to these and future P'Jazz concerts are available at the P'Jazz ticket office in the Hotel Pontchartrain 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. General admission tickets are sold at the terrace door beginning at 5 p.m. the night of each concert.

Telephone number for more information is 965-0200, ext. 1755.

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