

# 'Jacques Brel' staged superbly at dinner theater

By R.S. LEIDER.

"We're on a carousel, a crazy carousel," sings a quartet at the end of the evening. It starts with them asking us to join them on a carousel. We do. The evening grows richer. The ponies slide up, and our hearts beat with joy; the ponies lower, the ride slows and we inspect ourselves.

Then at the very end we are pleased with the wit and dazzle, heartbreak and unusual variety of the Theatre of the Arts staging of "Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris."

It's about time "Brel" was back and it couldn't be in more capable and creative hands.

This musical compilation of music, lyrics and commentary of the late Frenchman plays every Friday and Saturday evening at the Machus restaurant, Mr. Mac's Stable, in Dearborn's Parkland Towers. The show runs through the first weekend in March.

There is not a single emotion Brel

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doesn't touch. But he just doesn't hand it to you. He makes you think. He doesn't always make it easy, but he always lets you enjoy. Brel's work is poetry, and poetry does not hold the same meaning for all people.

THIS IS not to say that the evening is confusing. It is hardly a maze. Though it is hardly "Tomorrow," orphans and a cute dog, it is intelligent and rather beautiful.

Music director and pianist Rebecca Wheeler has blended the performers' voices, her combo and her wonderful work at the piano with skill and delicacy. The sound is a fifth performer in itself, always there, never obtrusive. Ms. Wheeler presents all the musical

elements of Brel with exacting perfection.

The direction and staging by Michael J. Klier is simply brilliant. Klier has made use of every plane of the performers' bodies down to the raising of an eyebrow and the twitch of a finger.

His work is creative and most importantly does not fight the music. Where Brel is mysterious, the actors move like sleek cats. When Brel is outrageous, the performers escape from caution with swirling movements or a clever drunk routine.

Klier, who also produced the show, asks in his program note that we allow ourselves to be touched simply and honestly. His staging permits us to.

WHAT CONTINUES to be a strong point for Theatre of the Arts is that the group continues to attract stunning new talent. This is the first TAP Ltd. (as the group is now calling its dinner theater division) show for each of the

four performers, who are very different yet very compatible with each other.

There are no leads in this show. All performers give to the audience and take from each other equally. No one tries to steal away the show, though any one of them, by right of talent, could. There are no weak links.

Rosalind Hurwitz has a beautiful soprano voice. Her look and manner are intriguing. She is not commercial, nor is she distant. Her interpretation of "Marieke" is warm and loving, while she shakes us with the maddening and frustrating "Sons Of." Her range is as beautiful as Brel's.

With a bright look and adoring manner, Katherine Dallas blows the audience away with "Brussels." She is at once captivating and cute. She draws you in with the energy one comes to the theater to see. Ms. Dallas is always on, always aware and very good.

A third delight of the evening is Mike Wantuck. He uses his youthful appear-

ance and strong voice to his advantage. In "Bachelor's Dance" he is young and capricious. Conversely, he brings a special maturity to a difficult love song like "Fannie." And when he plays drunk in "Middle Class" his grape music tache from drinking out of a carafe makes him all the more delightful. He is a very talented young man.

RON CARTER provides us with Reel's more strong and biting songs. He sings deliberately of past loves and comically of his own "Funeral Tango." His strongest moment is in "Amsterdam" where he sings off his elegant cutaway, opens his shirt and in song relates the rotting life of a sailor.

Carter becomes all the elements of the distasteful environment he is describing while we cling to him for every last detail.

The dinner and service at this Machus restaurant remain superior in dinner theater circles. The delicious and varied appetizers and entrees and, of course, the famous Machus pastries make the first half of the evening a dining pleasure.

The technical aspect of this production is so subtle, yet so right and vital it could easily go unnoticed except for the carnivalesque light show in the number "dam" where he draws us into the last moments of Brel's marathon of love, frustration, youth, death and loneliness.

# 'Beatlemania' captures memories

By NICK CHARLES

Four men, all in their middle 20s, do a great job of leading the audience on a two-hour journey into the past in "Beatlemania."

This is the second time the popular show, which opened Feb. 4, has been in the Detroit area. It was presented last summer at Pine Knob Music Theatre in Clarkston.

"Beatlemania" is four men who look and sound like the Beatles, leading the audience chronologically through a selection of the Beatles' music as films and slides of the times make you feel like you are reliving the period.

The show opens with a large thin screen flashing films of America's history. The band opens with one of the Beatles' first hits, "I Wanna Hold Your Hand."

As the evening rolls on, the group grows older and style changes occur in both hair and costume.

THE "FAB FOUR," who made their

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big splash from Liverpool to the states, were gaining recognition with the hits "She Loves You," "Help!" "I Fell" and "Can't Buy Me Love."

TV and screen personalities, such as Tony Dow, Marilyn Monroe, Billy Graham, the Munsters and "Star Trek" stars, flash on the screen while the group changes from dark suits and short hair to white suits and top hats.

As they lead into "Day Tripper," Anthony Abruzzo, who plays Paul McCartney, instructs the audience to clap along.

Abruzzo brings his acoustic guitar down to the front of the stage to sing "Yesterday" and the other three join him, in T-shirts and suspenders, for "Eleanor Rigby."

AFTER A QUICK change, complete

with long hair, the group works into a psychedelic medley with "A Day in the Life," "Strawberry Fields" and "Penny Lane," music written for drug-using youths.

A creative assortment of films, photos, comics and child-like crayon drawings enhance the colorful and crazy swirls of light.

Songs like "Magical Mystery Tour" and "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" sum up the period.

After a short intermission, we find the Beatles in the studio, complete with producer, horns and strings, to record "Lady Madonna." Tarot cards and obscure artwork flashes across the screen as the band performs "Got to Get You into My Life," "Michelle" and "Get Back" for the scene known as "Dropping Out."

Film clips of the Who, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and the Jefferson Airplane at Woodstock keep the audience amused as "Beatlemania" changes. In minutes the group is back with "Come

Together" from the Beatles' "Abbey Road" album.

LOU COLUCCI, who played the part of Ringo Starr, sang "With a Little Help from My Friends." Michael Palukis, as the late John Lennon, sings "All You Need is Love" from the piano, as a now-bearded Jimmy Poe as George Harrison accompanies him on guitar.

Revolution," "Helter Skelter" and "Hey Jude" were in the spotlight for the sad period in time when the war raged on in Vietnam and Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated.

The last scene finds the Beatles becoming more individualistic and ready to split up. The now-bearded Abruzzo leads the users in "I Am the Walrus," "The Long and Winding Road" and "Let It Be."

The news headlines on the moving sign above them says, "The Beatles Break Up . . ."

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