

Jacques Brel lives again in the Valley

By Herb Brin

The port of Amsterdam is alive and somewhat well in the Valley. San Fernando, that is. And Timid Frieda walks gently to her destinies, holding her valises ever tightly in her hands.

Next! Next! Oh Marieke, Marieke
... alas, if only we have love.

Jacques Brel is come to town. No longer alive and living in Paris.

The songs are there. The fire and the sparks there at the Back Alley Theater on Burbank Blvd. in Van Nuys. Inevitably, Jacques Brel is missing in a cute, cute, cute stupid-arse way.

It's not the fault of the players. They're as good as they can be. But Marathon is not the marathon dance Jacques Brel depicted and Amsterdam — the Port of Amsterdam — is missing the crag-faced fishermen who spit fishheads in the wind, afraid to belch for bodily reasons.

Saying this, you'll still be enthralled by the **Jacques Brel Is . . .** production at the Back Alley, directed by Allan Miller and produced by Laura Zucker.

The cast is singularly capable, featuring Joseph Cardinale, Melissa Converse,

Michael J. Hawkins, Geraldine Joyce and Thom Keeling.

It's all of 10 years since a Brel production appeared on the Southland scene. Too long. Jacques Brel is the poetry-musical legend of our time. Any other poet-composer, including Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht, are overshadowed by the towering genius of Brel.

Damn. One can't write about this show without inwardly singing "The Desperate Ones" or "Old Folks."

I found the female singers understated in their beauty. They should wear stark makeup as the women do in the Port of Amsterdam. And my gut calls for crag-faced men belting out "The Bulls."

And I listened in vain for the Flemish and French counterparts to the Brel songs. Missing, unfortunately, except in one small segment of Marieke. But then, if you miss this show, you're hardly alive.

If you look, perhaps you'll find Jacques Brel looking down, smiling wickedly.

His songs are alive. They're grabbers.