

Music of Jacques Brel is Still Vibrant

Rob Stevens

VAN NUYS—The Back Alley Theatre is presenting the first Los Angeles area production of *Jacques Brel Is ...* in ten years. Nearly 20 years after the original New York production took the theatre world by storm.

Jacques Brel was a Belgium-born poet and singer who lived in Paris. Instead of writing about the conventional Paris, Brel wrote songs about sailors and whores, soldiers and war, old age and hope. In 1968 Eric Blau and Mort

on drums and Pablo Aslan on bass guitar.

The talented cast of five singers/performers excel at every opportunity: Michael G. Hawkins and Geraldine Joyce with "Marieke," Thom Keeling with "Fanette," Joseph Cardinale with the antiwar "Next," Melissa Converse with "I Loved." And with such ensemble numbers as "Marathon," "Alone," "Amsterdam" and "Carousel," the audience remains in a constant state of cheering.

Although Brel's songs dwell heavily on death, war and the hopelessness of love, he and the show leave us with a note of hope for the future, the stirring ballad, "If We Only Have Love."

The technical aspects are perfectly in sync



ED KRIEGER

The cast of "JACQUES BREL IS ..." (from left): GERALDINE JOYCE, MELISSA CONVERSE, MICHAEL G. HAWKINS, JOSEPH CARDINALE and THOM KEELING. The revue is at the BACK ALLEY THEATRE in Van Nuys.

Shuman translated the lyrics of over 20 of Brel's songs and fashioned a powerful, theatrical event.

The Back Alley's production is a breath of fresh air, lively, daring, and bursting with passion and energy. Director Allan Miller has invigoratingly directed his talented cast in their solos, duets and ensemble numbers.

The musical direction by Steven Bernstein is excellent, as is the playing of the onstage band of three: Bernstein on keyboards, John Graff

with the material, Sylvia Moss' muted pastel costumes, Leslie Rose's lighting, and Rich Rose's nightclub stage setting.

If you have never experienced Jacques Brel, don't miss this golden opportunity. If you have seen Jacques Brel in the past, renew your acquaintance with his powerful music. This is a must-see production.

(The Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd. in Van Nuys, Thursdays-Sundays until May 31, 818/780-2240.)