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Otterbein's 'Brel' lacking life, zest

By Michael Grossberg
Dispatch Theater Critic

Nostalgia is becoming dated judging from Otterbein College's *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*.

Otterbein's summer "musical" evokes a few wispy memories of first loves and first losses, but they don't add up to much. That's largely because of the limitations of *Brel* — a loose collection of Brel's songs tied together only by a mood of tarnished romanticism.

Showing off the most polished voice of the six-person cast is guest artist Tracy Dodrill. Plaintively singing *I Loved or Marieke*, she commands the stage — an elegant checkerboard-mound set by guest artist D. Martyn Bookwalter. Dodrill also shines when she leads the company in *Carousel*, *Brel's* only show-stopper.

Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris will be presented at 8:30 p.m. Saturday and 2:30 p.m. Sunday in the Campus Center Arena Theatre. Performances continue at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through July 12. For reservations, call 890-3028.

REVIEW

IN NEXT, Kevin Carty sings jauntily but painfully about his loss of innocence — and virginity. Carty has a boyish energy that shines through the jaded sophistication of Brel's songs.

In *Middle Class*, Carty joins forces with solid tenor David Caldwell to "scandalize" Otterbein's presumed mid-

dle-class audience by dropping their pants. Of course, the crowd isn't shocked at all. They love it.

In *Amsterdam*, Tim Gregory sings amusingly about sailors looking for love. Gregory is at his best as the clown of the show; he's also compelling when he takes on a more romantic aura in *Alone and Fanaette*.

Catherine Randazzo projects a bit-tersweet sadness in *My Death*, while Christine Cox imbues *No Love You're Not Alone* with a wry tenderness. Randazzo's voice carries through the theater-in-the-round, but Cox's voice fades a bit.

That's it — the highlights of this cabaret-style revue. *Brel*, which really can't be considered a musical, succeeds in recreating the mock-sophisticated airs of a 1920s European nightclub —

one in which the singers help their patrons look back on World War I with sorrow and on their former prewar innocence with regret.

REGRETFULLY, DIRECTOR Robert Hetherington has not done much to help the cast members flesh out their limited singer-roles. His choreography is weak and their characterizations are weaker. At least the orchestra, led by musical director and pianist Kenneth Kleszynski, plays well.

When Brel wrote his songs, their range of subject matter — from war deaths to venereal disease — probably seemed fresh. In an era grown accustomed to Stephen Sondheim's musical wit, Brel's songs have become dated. Their original satiric bite is gone, leaving nothing but a tattered charm.



Dispatch photo by Ken Chamberlain

Tracy Dodrill

More than that is needed to turn this pleasant evening of singing into a magical evening at the theater. Pretend you're going to a nightclub instead of Otterbein's Arena Theatre, however, and you may enjoy it.

Vulnerable, human performances in 'Jupus Redeye'

The Contemporary American Theatre Company opened their summer season with "Jupus Redeye," written by Ohio native, Robert Flanagan.

"Jupus Redeye" was first a short story (1981) based on his mother's tales of her childhood. In 1983 he adapted the story for the stage in response to the Delaware Theatre Association's request that he write a play for them. That production lasted almost three hours. During the next two years "Jupus Redeye" was adapted and readapted during staged readings at Ohio Wesleyan and at two separate Ohio Theatre Alliance Playwriting workshops.

As a result the play was cut from thirteen to eight scenes and several characters were written out of the script.

In "Jupus Redeye" we met the Wings. Father (Ken Erney) is interested in science, the changing world around him, new ideas, new directions. But personally he has trouble keeping jobs and earning a living.

Father is a city person. Mother (Carol Giffen) was born and raised on a farm and her beliefs and focus are on family and religion. These basics of life are her anchors for living. Erney and Giffen were very human, vulnerable and believable in their roles. They showed great strength and sensitivity as a couple, as individuals and as parents. The two sons, Hume Doig Wing (Jay Macke) and Socrates Fenn Wing (Eric Dawson) were a contrast of personalities. Hume was the oldest, the first son, rather a bully, and not overly bright.

The baby of the family is Socrates or 'Socks', who is often bullied by his big brother and in the middle of all this family, the eye of the storm, is the daughter Minnie Wing played with polished control by Mara Lieberman. Minnie is often the arbitrator between her parents and between her brothers. She is the brightest of the three children and as a result each of her parents is trying to develop her into their own image and way of thinking.

Minnie is the listener, the arbitrator, the peacemaker, the independent thinker of the family. She is open to all, without the need to make others believe as she believes. Lieberman had great understanding of Minnie and let us share with her, in a very believable, very human way, her transition from child to adult. The five Wings gave sound and effective performances as individuals and as a collective ensemble.

"Jupus Redeye" runs through July 19. For ticket reservations and information call the theater box office at 422-2295.

THE OTTERBEIN Summer Theatre's second production of this season, "Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and

act II

Jean Ann Wolfe-Weaver



Living in Paris," is quite a contrast to their opening production of "Ah, Wilderness." But what the two productions do have in common are quality of performance, quality of direction and audience enjoyment.

Director Robert Hetherington, choreographer Susan Van Pelt and musical director Kenneth Kleszynski, combined their talents with Equity Guest artist, Tracy Dodrill and scenery and lighting professional guest artist D. Martyn Bookwalter to put together a strongly paced musical which covers moods and styles from here to there and back again.

Boel's music has a variety of moods, sounds and messages, that are always interesting, always changing and always of quality. The six performers were equal to the challenge of that variety. Tracy Dodrill's "I Loved Yet You See I've Forgotten Your Name," was touching, yet humorous. "Marieke" was done with great feeling and Dodrill's lead role in Carousell, with the company, was a three (out of a three star possibility) musical number. She has talent, class and the self determination of a true performer.

Tim Gregory was out standing in "Amsterdam" and "Fanatte," both solos. He reminds me of a young Robert Redford.

"Jacques Brel is Alive and Well..." is the only production of the Otterbein Summer Theatre that runs for two weeks. You still have time to catch this production July 8-12. Call the Otterbein Theatre box office, 898-1109; immediately and if you are lucky you will get to see this not to often available musical. This production is dynamite.

ON MONDAY, June 30, the annual Players Theatre Awards Night was held in the Agnes Jeffrey Shedd Theatre. This was the most positive awards program I have seen at PTC, and I have attended maybe five or six awards events in the past ten years.

I would like to share with you the winners of the 1985-86 Players Theatre outstanding achievement awards.

In the area of volunteerism: Elizabeth Greene, Mark

Boley, Sarah Dowds and Board President Molly Brownlee. The Outstanding Volunteer-of-the-Year Award was presented to Lynne Jenkins.

For acting in a youth production winners are: Linda Yerina (Baby in *Busby Berkeley Bears*), Richard Wicksham (Daddy in *Busby Berkeley Bears*), Colby Paul (Goldie in *Busby Berkeley Bears*), Denise Davis (Joan in *Busby Berkeley Bears*), and Carol Visscher Brand (Stephanie in *You Don't See Me*.)

For acting in an adult production outstanding achievement awards were presented to Tommi Cheuvront (*Brecht on Brecht*), Christopher Moore Griffin (Roland Maule in *Present Laughter*), C. Joseph Hietter (Garry Essendine in *Present Laughter*), Tracy Graham (Daphne Stillington in *Present Laughter*), Linda Dorff (Annie Nations in *FoxFire*), Geb Johnson (Hector Nations in *FoxFire*.)

Michael Harper (James Leeds in *Children of a Lesser God*), Martha Sheridan (Sarah Norman in *Children of a Lesser God*), Bev Pettit (Thelma Cates in *Night Mother*), Jacqueline Bates (Jessie Cates in *Night Mother*), Jay Pontius (Juan Peron in *Evita*), Todd Neal (Che in *Evita*.)

The singing and dancing company of *Evita* for their performance in *Evita*. That company includes: Ted Amore, Cynthia Apfelbach, Edna Balser, Eric Boardsen, Bob Burdard, Deborah Colvin, Chandra Davis, Denise Davis, Constance Denham, Tracy Graham, Christopher Moore Griffin, Matt Griffin, Carole Gorte, Doug Joseph, Mike Klausung, Preston Misner, Alice Mooney, Ellen Moore, Carmine Pacchino, Jim Rook, Dana Rowe, Barbara Sproul, Bill Sterling, Todd Taylor, Thomas Warfel, Jeff Will, Arlane Barnette-Williams, Jayne Wenner, Laurel Johnson, Chris Maag, Jenny Renshaw, Crista Wells, and D.J. Williams.

The best production of the year award was *Evita*, directed by Ed Graczyk with music direction by Nancy Nocks and choreography by Richard Wickersham.

The Outstanding Achievement Awards were presented by: Tom Birmingham, managing director of Ballet Met; Firman H. Brown Jr., OSU Theatre Department chairperson; Jeff Frank, proprietor of the Drexel Theatre; Tullia Hamilton, vice president, Grants with the Columbus Foundation; Raymond J. Hanley, executive director of the Greater Columbus Arts Council; Wayne P. Lawson, executive director of the Ohio Arts Council; Jim O'Conner, entertainment editor of the Dispatch; Christy Perry, anchorperson for WCMH-TV; Les Susie, Columbus Recreation and Parks Department Program development director; and Jean Ann Wolfe-Weaver, arts critic and columnist with Suburban News Publications Inc.