

Murray Bramwell's Reviews

Appeared in - The Australian

The Songs of Jacques Brel

Mich en Scene

Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre.

11 June until 17 June.

Farewell Concert

Combo Fiasco

Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre.

11 June.

With 26 performances of its two week program already sold out, the Adelaide Cabaret Festival is bringing a winter boost to the often dark Festival Centre. The opening weekend alone has some 11,000 punters in every nook and cranny of the building, eagerly grooving on musical styles from smooth soul, hip Cuban, and retro Broadway to contemporary Australian and French boulevard ballads.

Performing in Australia for the first time is the excellent Mich en Scene, a cool young Belgian quartet whose deft and understated readings of chansonier, Jacques Brel, bring freshness to an oeuvre that has been variously looted in the forty or so years since Brel first enchanted his Paris audiences. Led by stylish singer Micheline Van Hautem, Mich en Scene give us Brel Unplugged with Frederick Caelen nimble on accordion and minimalist piano, bassist Bob Wisselink and Frank de Klerk on Spanish guitar.

It is a well judged program - Les Marquises, fluently phrased by Van Hautem to just a garnish of bass and accordion, and the tender La Chanson des Vieux Amants, capturing the pathos of the song without sentiment. And the big guns of the canon are here - Mathilde, Ne Me Quitte Pas, sung in the Shuman translation, and the gamy Amsterdam. But the highlight is the encore, Voir un Ami Pleurer, sung without microphone with the group serenading us from the edge of the stage. It is what Brel should be and often isn't - subtle, intelligent, and completely captivating. Mich en Scene also have a second show next weekend, Madame, a tribute to Sarah Vaughan, Piaf and Dietrich. Don't miss them, they're brel-liant.

After eleven years, local favourites Combo Fiasco are calling it a day with two farewell nights of highlights from their wide range of music theatre

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and Broadway favourites. Fiasco in name only, they are a slick outfit, with smooth harmony and hair trigger timing. The trio, Shaun Murphy, Tony McGill and Charmaine McClements, joined in the second half by the Cat Scratch Orchestra, belt out a mix of standards, parodies and novelties. All expertly delivered, some work better than others - McClements' excruciating pitch in I'm on the Stage is a hoot, as is McGill's The Contempt Beneath my Feet. There are contributions also from Harry Warren, Peter Allen, Fats Waller - and Sweet Georgia Brown. The Combo begins with Sentimental Journey, so where else to finish but Over the Rainbow? Thanks for all the fiasco.