

Jacques Brel worthy of a standing ovation

By Sarah Sobanski

Over the first two weekends of April, *Jacques Brel is alive and well and living in Maynooth* brought a little bit of Paris to Maynooth. I had the opportunity to journey north and absorb the performance ? wow, what a feat.

The company featured 16 people: Kirk Bates, Mary Burbidge, Brad Carleton, Brad Culver, Elizabeth Emmerson, Jim Henry, Natasha Rachel Hurst, Ron Kapitan, Andra Kauffeldt, Karen Vernon-Weaver, Glenn Palmer, producer Kim Crawford, head of wardrobe Maureen Kelly, music director Erin Morlock, set designer Arne Rooseman and director Joey Shulman. Together they presented 25 Brel songs in over two hours at a time.

Now, what I know about musicals could fill a thimble. Luckily, original Canadian company member for the show ? which premiered in Toronto in the late '60s ? Judith Lander attended a performance of Maynooth's *Brel*. She spoke with me on what to watch for and her thoughts.

Something that was interesting about this musical was that there wasn't a plot in the regular sense of a theatrical performance.

Lander explained to me that each song in itself was a story.

?It's one song into the next, one song into the next. It doesn't have a script. It doesn't tell a story because each song tells a story.

There's songs about lost love, songs about love, songs about infatuation, songs about death, a lot of songs about war ? the absurdity of war, the devastation of war ? and songs about uplift[ing people]? The last song is 'If We Only Have Love.' He's saying love conquers all, so it's really a positive story in the end.?

Brel was born at the end of the '20s, according to the musical's program. He grew up through many momentous decades in the world's history including the war in Vietnam, which Lander explained Brel didn't agree with. Many of his songs hold themes of the times he was a part of.

?It's having a bit of a revival now because our thoughts have turned more to the devastation of war, the things that have gone on in the Middle East, we're more aware of this again, we forgot about it for a while,? said Lander.

This contributed to why the musical was so moving for so many. At the end of the dress rehearsal everyone was standing and applauding. The company brought these raw themes with such emotion that it claimed the hearts of those who watched. Lander said she felt the same.

?I was very moved by what I saw. I think it was so authentic because it took so much courage. It was a very courageous thing to do. Some of the audience knew the musical. They had seen it over the years. Many people had never seen it. It was fun to watch the audience get into the show and by the end everyone was standing because they were cheering and they were feeling these different songs about life and love and war and so by the end the audience was rapt. I was thrilled to see this. It was a wonderful experience.?

The musical was about so much more than the songs. It was inspiring to see a community come together and give it their all. Who knew the Old Community Center in Maynooth could be transformed like it was for the play ? the set built by local talent. Who knew that we had these talents, and these abilities?

?This is the way that somebody said it to me, it's about the little town that could. This is about your town, and the singers of your town, with the wonderful direction of Joey Schulman, taking on these very difficult songs to sing, they're vocally difficult ? it was many, many words and a lot of emotion ? so here you had your people who can sing, some people who had never sung and here they're singing these enormous, emotional songs one after the next. And they did it. They managed it. They sung. They did it. It was very authentic. They pulled it off. I thought it was amazing ? They told the songs their way as people. It was super ambitious and they did it. It was very moving.?

If you didn't have a chance to make it to Maynooth for the musical, keep an eye out for the next ? fingers crossed that there will be one. As for Lander, she said she can't wait to come back and visit.

?I'd never been to Bancroft ... or Maynooth. I had such a wonderful feeling being there, I just want to come back and visit because people were just, so just there. They were very open and warm to me.?