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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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Jacques Brel Is Alive And Well And Living In New York

The musical "Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living In Paris" is one of those classic shows whose name pops up constantly but which I've never seen and really don't even know what it's about. (Other long-running hits I've always seen mentioned but are similarly mysterious to me include "Abbie's Irish Rose," "Tobacco Road," "Butterflies Are Free" and "Mumenchanz.") But "Jacques Brel" is currently revived Off Broadway, where it first debuted in 1968 and ran for 1,800+ performances. Turns out it's a jukebox musical -- that currently maligned musical genre that celebrates a particular songwriter or artist. "Jacques Brel" is clearly a precursor to "Ain't Misbehavin'," another great jukebox musical. But this one was clearly shadowed by Vietnam since so many of the songs they chose are about war and death. Beyond curiosity, I was drawn by "American Idol's" Constantine Mouralis, who just joined the cast. If I didn't know his history, I'm sure I wouldn't have blinked twice about his being in this four person cast. He may be the weakest of the four, but he's not too rock n roll. Actually, if anything he's too theater-ish. Constantine would be great in the current revival of "Les Miz." He's also best in the comic moments and I think he could be very good in the right role. Jane Paterson (who played Fantine on Broadway when the original "Les Miz" closed) is lovely and good as the other young presence. Everyone indeed has their moments, including Robert Cuccioli (of "Jeckyl & Hyde"). But the revelation for me was Gay Marshall, a tiny but extremely French presence who delivered her songs effortlessly. With everyone else, I was often aware of their performances -- often happily so. With Gay, all I ever noticed was the song. It's no surprise she got the strongest applause of the night. The other star is of course Brel. All in all, a very enjoyable little show.

POSTED BY MICHAEL IN NEW YORK AT 1:10 PM



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