

THE 10TH ANNUAL FRENCH PLAY AT WHITTIER COLLEGE KICK-OFF EVENT FOR NATIONAL FRENCH WEEK 2006

Nearly four hundred Francophiles of all ages celebrated the 10th annual French play at Whittier College with *Jacques Brel ou l'Impossible Rêve* performed by Continent II as a kickoff event for National French Week 2006. This musical play took place at the Ruth B. Shannon Center for the Performing Arts.

Songwriter and performer, Jacques Brel (1929-1978) moved audiences with elegies of love, mock-epics of bourgeois doldrums, and grim derisions of death. Over a rich range of melodies and musical styles, Brel's writing mixed blue-collar lyricism with Beat poetics. Born in a traditional Flemish family living in a suburb of Brussels, Brel chose singing over working in his father's factory.

Reputed director and actor André Nerman illuminated the stage with a dramatic montage of Brel's own songs and poems (in their original French version) to paint the life of Brel. French stage star, Nelly Anne Rabas, sang and acted with Nerman over live accompaniments of pianist Laurent Clergeau. All three actors received a standing ovation at the end of the show.

Continent II took a break from its ongoing performances at the *Théâtre du Tambour Royal* in Paris for a U.S. tour. After the performance at Whittier College, Continent II headed back to Paris for their 100th performance at the *Théâtre du Tambour Royal*.

The list of songs interpreted by the actors were available on my Web site. Judging by the reactions in the theater, it was manifest that even the young high school students followed what was happening onstage and that they had been well-prepared by their teachers.

This event was a special year for Whittier College and for me, as it marked the 10th anniversary of the celebration of a French Week at my college. I organized the first show in 1996. For that first French celebration, the *Compagnie Claude Beauclair* performed Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, attended by 160 Francophiles. Thanks to Dave Palmer, Production Coordinator and Theater Manager of the Shannon Center, since 1997 this annual French event has happened in the beautiful and spacious Shannon Center, welcoming students from our college and guests from schools and organizations from the Los Angeles area, almost to full capacity every year (about 380 Francophiles yearly).

Indeed, much of the success of this annual event is due to Dave Palmer's fine organization and his overseeing of every detail backstage. Dave was particularly instrumental with lighting and sound, a very deli-

cate task this year, considering how elaborate this show was and the little time actors had at their disposal. He was assisted by two students David Virissimo and Tomas Felix-Neal. Operations Assistant Ronald Maurer oversaw the box office ticket organization for the show, which was sold out two weeks before the event and which had a long waiting list of guests wanting to come. He was patient and well-organized with our last minute guests and found a seat for everyone! On the night of the event, he was assisted by one of our French majors, Lindsay Johnson.

Finally, I wish to thank the many sponsors and supporters who made it possible to organize this event: the Office of Academic Affairs at Whittier College, the AATF and the Southern California Chapter, the Shannon Center, and the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Whittier College.

Our guests' enjoyment and enthusiasm, coupled with all the positive feedback following the show, make me look forward to our 11th annual French Play during National French Week 2007, pending funding of course. *Vive la Semaine du Français!*

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