

In the '70s and '80s, few cabaret artists didn't at some point in their careers do a Jacques Brel show or at least perform some of his by-then familiar music. But one loyal singer that made this artist her own was Laurika Rauch. Her fine interpretative skills married beautifully with his music and lyrics and finally she has captured this brilliance on a CD titled *The Brel Album*. DIANE DE BEER spoke to her and reviewed the album

## Putting the Rauch touch on to Brel

It was Brel's music that first attracted the young Laurika Rauch to stage. She knew that this was what she wanted to do. Only 16 years old at the time that her mother took her to a Brel concert, she already knew the music because of a Belgian friend who had given them the records.

And then Brel champion Taubie Kuschlick heard Laurika sing when she was casting for a Brel show in Hillbrow's Chelsea in the early '80s. She was summoned for an audition, invited into the boudoir, asked to talk about her life and given the job.

"It was a glorious time," says Laurika who with her long slim legs, fishnet stockings, and bluesy voice had critics and audiences raving. She moved on and it was in the early '90s that Marius from the then After Dark, Pretoria's fondly-remembered cabaret spot asked her to do another show. "It was going to be in July and I knew the time was right to do Brel again," she says.

I remembered going to the show almost resigned because Brel had already been done to death and by that time the Rauch/Brel memories had faded. But when she got onto stage and started singing his music, it was given nuances and depth that one had not heard before in his music. "I think I had enough baggage at that time to really work with his music," explains the perfectionist performer who confesses that on an overseas tour, Brel's agent complimented her on doing the definitive Brel.

The lack of "emotional baggage" was partly why she has waited all this time before she recorded the music. Teaming with Peter McLea who has been Laurika's arranger on all her albums for many years, she feels that they have got under the skin of this melancholy composer/songwriter and those who hear the music will agree.

Musically, as always, much is happening on the Rauch front. She has recently been working with a group of youngsters directing a show called *Padlans* which they want to take on the road. One of the trio is Karla du Plessis, the daughter of Koos who wrote the song *Kinders van die Wind* which was Laurika's first recording. "We were working



on one of her dad's songs when I suddenly realised I couldn't do this," she explains. It was just to close too home, but having given her word and always one to nurture new talent, she faced the demons.

Probably her most exciting production for many years will kick off at Pretoria's Little Theatre in March when, on her initiative, she teams up with Mamelodi's Vusi Mahlasela.

"I have wanted to perform with him for a long time yet when I booked the theatre at the beginning of the year, I didn't know what I was going to do." But once Vusi agreed, Laurika contacted Deon Opperman to direct,

Peter McLea as musical director and Vusi's longtime collaborator Louis Mhlanga and percussionist Jahn Beukes to form part of the band.

"I'm truly thrilled about this show and hopefully we will be touring, going to the Klein Karoo Arts Festival and perhaps overseas," explains Laurika. But fortunately for us, these two magnificent artists, both with their distinctive voices, will be premiering in Pretoria. Vusi will be singing some of his own compositions, Laurika will follow with her music and then two of Pretoria's best voices will join in song.



## Gentle music blows you away

**Laurika Rauch: *The Brel Album* (Select Music) - 9:**

Perhaps it is the simplicity of the approach. Rauch has always been at her best when she has a song which needs her special interpretative touch. And who better than Brel.

Having performed him for many years, she finally felt ready to put some tracks down on CD. It shows. Even for those tired of Brel, she breathes new life. But then I have always felt that she knows exactly how to sing his music.

With producer Peter McLea at her side, she knows she is in safe hands. It's all here from the beautiful *I Loved*, the melancholy *Old Folks*, the haunting *Early Morning Hangers On* and other old favourites like *Little Hypocrites*, *Marieke*, *Moenie Weggaan Nie* and all the others included on this really beautiful album.

This is gentle music that takes you to another world. Get this one for those times you just want to be overwhelmed by the music, the singer and the song.