With 26 performances of its two week program already sold out, the Adelai-
de 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 chan-
sonnier, Jacques Brel, bring freshness to an oeuvre that has been variously
looted in the forty or so years since Brel first enchanted his Paris audi-
ences. Led by stylish singer Micheline Van Hautem, Mich en Scene give us
Brel Unplugged with Frederick Caelen nimble on accordion and minimal-
ist 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 Chan-
son des Vieux Amants, capturing the pathos of the song without senti-
ment. 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
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.