

## Road Songs: Paris

BY CHLOE NELSON

Down the street from the iconic Moulin Rouge, the theater Les Trois Baudets modestly hides behind summer scaffolding, no windmills in sight. Les Trois Baudets, “The Three Donkeys” in English, hosts a variety of musical and theatrical events these days. Founded by music executive Jacques Canetti in the 1940s, Les Trois Baudets introduced Paris to a fair share of young singer-songwriters in its heyday; the site transformed into an erotic shop and theater for several decades in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and then reemerged in 2009 as a music venue for new acts once more.

Throughout the month of July, the venue was taken over by Les Garçons, a group of three French singers who reinterpret mid-century pop hits made famous by many of the men who, years prior, graced the stage of Les Trois Baudets. Zaza Fournier, Cléa Vincent, and Luciole are the names of these three young ladies, all French pop chanteuses in their own right.

We attended the trio’s closing evening on a whim, and the evening unfolded into a charming rediscovery and reexamination of a masculine culture I never knew. The equivalent in America might be a reinterpretation of Buddy Holly, Elvis, and Nat King Cole; that said, the French post-war songbook is altogether foreign to someone raised in an Anglophone country. The audience hummed and sang along to several ditties.

Dressed in well-fit masculine suit jackets and tomboy garb, hair down, never attempting the full-on drag act, Les Garçons engaged with, poked fun at, and reappropriated the alpha-male French singer: icons from the golden era of passionate and cheeky singer-songwriters who simplify the female body parts into soft, fruitlike objects, telling their friends of their bravado, lamenting the one that got away.

The one man on stage was a multi-instrumentalist, sporting flashy white Repetto dancing shoes à la Serge Gainsbourg. The repertoire of the evening included the brooding Gainsbourg, passionate and melancholy Charles Aznavour and Belgian legend Jacques Brel. The one song I recognized was a reinterpretation of “Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps,” which I (like most Americans) associate with the effervescent Doris Day. *En français*, the title is “Qui sait, qui sait, qui sait,” closer to the Spanish original (“Quizás, quizás, quizás”). Les Garçons’ version was modeled after Henri Salvador’s bouncy samba.