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review
Irma la Douce

Despite the impression given by films such as "Never on Sunday", prostitutes don't lead very pleasant lives and generally speaking are not happy people. Any production that portrays them as such must be considered a fantasy. This is how one can class the DGDS's "Irma La Douce" which ran January 27-31 in the McInnes Room of the SUB.

"Irma" is a fantasy and should have been very light, colorful and fast-paced. Colorful it was but so slow and heavy that it failed to provide the entertainment one expects from a show that ran on Broadway for a year and that is a DGDS product.

While all the blame cannot be placed on one person for Irma's failure to deliver the goods, the director, Pam Michael, must, because of her position, accept most of the responsibility. It was obvious that she had done a lot of work on "Irma", especially in the choreography department, but her great failure seems to have been her lack of aggressiveness. The cast, including leading lady Sharon Martin and male lead Frank Mendleson, seemed to display a tense lack of confi-

ence to lapse into vulgarity, which is perhaps what Miss Martin was avoiding. Her voice was most pleasant and she performed all her songs well, although she was a little extreme on some of the numbers. Her love scenes with Mendleson came across very well. One other point: did she really have to get pregnant to rate a costume change?

Frank Mendleson, in the dual role of Nestor and Oscar, was less than outstanding but more than adequate. He really shone in scenes with his four compatriots, especially in the prison lament scene in Act II. Also, as mentioned above, the love scenes with Irma were very nicely done. What Mendleson lacked was the strong voice many of the serious songs, sans Irma, required. This was hardly noticeable however, because of his obviously genuine dedication to the role(s?).

The really outstanding performances in "Irma" came from the supporting cast, two of which turned in brilliant performances. The first was Tim Lambert as Roberto. Lambert was really enjoying his role and consequently, so was the audience. He was excellent throughout but was par-



dence on opening night and, to a lesser extent, in subsequent performances, that marred the whole presentation.

It can only be concluded that this lack of confidence arose from lack of dedication to the individual character being played. Granted, audiences were not the most receptive and pre-production charisma that encouraging but this should spur the cast on to give more of themselves, not to crack at the first sign of opposition as many did. Direction, it can be concluded, was not tight enough. This showed in the fact that the show was much too long and that the actors and actresses seemed unable to project a genuine understanding of their parts which crueling practice under a demanding director would have produced.

Of course, Pam Michael is not entirely to blame for the disappointing quality of "Irma". The cast must share the blame because of their obvious mistakes, the most apparent being the lack of self-discipline which cannot be solely attributed to inadequate direction. Actors should live the characters they portray and share this living experience with the audience. An actor does not merely present a character to an audience; he shares with the audience the wonderment of all the facets of the character. If an audience does not react, the player must try harder. In "Irma La Douce", few tried at all after they met with the initial lack of response.

However, in case I should overstate my case, I will say that Miss Michael did give the audience several excellent scenes and the production produced several outstanding performers. Not surprisingly, these performers made the scene memorable by doing what all should have done, living the part with the audience.

Sharon Martin as Irma was not outstanding but adequate. Somehow, while she was physically appealing, her speeches and mannerisms did little to betray her profession. Here, however, I may be asking for too much. In such a role, it is very

particularly good in the trial scene and in the raft scene, both in Act II. (Act II, as you might have guessed, contained most of the good scenes.)

Terry McKibbin turned in an equally commendable performance as Bob, the focal character of the show. McKibbin, also portrayed the judge in the trial scene and the Old Prisoner in the Escape sequence. I could only think of Woody Allen whenever I saw him and was amazed at the dexterity with which he delivered his lines. His moment of glory had to be the monologue of the Old Prisoner dreaming of escape. (This may, indeed, be the high point of the whole play.) It was simply wonderful. Honourable mentions go to Vernon Oickle as Frangipane, a part easily overplayed, Bill Black who handled several parts satisfactorily and to Greg Yarrow and Danny Varverikos, who played the Inspector and Polyte respectively.

Musically, Irma can only be called mediocre. The three or four main themes were beaten to death but it was only the audience that suffered. This, of course, was not the fault of the orchestra, which I thought, did very well with what they had; they just didn't have enough. Pianists Barbara Shore and Dick Thomson deserve credit for excellent work.

Technically, the production also fell in several spots. Scenery was rather skimpy and the pauses between scenes t-o-o l-o-n-g. The attempt at audience involvement (the yellow spotlight running over the audience during the escape) was a good idea but failed because no one seemed to remember that the audience is looking at the stage and tends to miss action elsewhere. (Aside to the director; it's not good policy to have people sitting on the edge of the stage as the back rows find it impossible to hear let alone see.)

In summary, then, Irma was a production that might have succeeded if the director had been more ruthless, the cast more humble and receptive and the whole crew a little more enthusiastic about the whole enterprise.

by Stepher Mills