

# Despite the Striking Star, 'Irma La Douce' Is a Bore

By **CANDICE RUSSELL**  
Herald Theater Writer

Pamela Blair, *c'est si bonne*. But *Irma La Douce*? *Non, non*. All this is by way of saying that this musical fable set in Paris, which opened Friday night at the Players State Theater, is done well but not worth the doing.

Blair is a charmer as the prostitute from Pigalle. She has a plaintive, individual singing voice and a striking ability to dance that isn't shown off nearly enough.

But she's not sufficient to save this unexciting show, smothered in translation from the original French book and lyrics by Alexandre Breffort. Almost to a song, the score by Marguerite Monnot is a zero — uninteresting musically, not revealing of character, and unfunny.

THE SAME sense of *ennui* comes over me in watching *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*. In both shows there is a conscious attempt to recreate the "real" France, the one Fodor's guidebook readers never see. But the results seem faked and forced, as in this show, with its rough criminals and indifferent bastions of the law.

*Irma La Douce* isn't meant to be realistic, but a gay suggestion of a fascinating subculture. Supposedly quaint French slang peppers the dialogue, with words like "poule" for prostitute, "mec" for pimp and "grisbi" for money. This show tells us nothing new and entertains us only slightly. Were it not for Blair and a finely tuned cast under Michael Montel's direction, we would not be entertained at all. They do the best they can with anemic material.

Blair, a winsome package with more energy and verve than she is required to use, plays Irma beautifully. She has the sparkling giggle and girlish naiveté that are mandatory for anyone in the role. Dissolving in love with Nestor, a poor law student, she is the renounced coquette, yet still practical enough to ply her tart's trade.

NESTOR, handled suitably by

Jess Richards, is plagued by jealousy until he devises an elaborate ruse to become Irma's one-and-only client. It's all meant to be delightfully silly and carefree. It isn't.

What lifts the show from torpor when Blair isn't emoting cutely is Daryl Gray's choreography. A splashy production number with Blair as the seductive centerpiece in Act One had the opening-night audience clapping loudest. In Act Two, Gray came up with a whimsical dance of penguins that segued into a Latin-inspired showcase for Blair and a chorus of male dancers. This was Paris with a sizzle. Too bad there wasn't more of it.

The actor/dancers seemed far superior to their material. Typical of

them is Robert Grossman, by now a familiar face to Players State patrons. He is uncommonly funny as the narrator, the doddering judge, and a decrepit Devil's Island prisoner. Changing the mood, he brings home the romance and lyricism of Paris in a nicely recited bit of poetry in Act Two.

The 23 scene changes in the show are accomplished with praiseworthy speed. Kenneth N. Kurtz has created appealingly flashy sets, especially "Bob's Bar for the Uneasy" in riotous greens and purples.

**IRMA LA DOUCE** plays through April 15 at Players State Theater in the Coconut Grove Playhouse, 3500 Main Hwy. Tickets range from \$8.25 to \$10.25. For reservations, call 442-4000. Showtimes are Tuesday through Saturday at 8:15 p.m., Sunday at 7:30 p.m., and Wednesday and Saturday at 2 p.m.



Pamela Blair as Irma Sings, Dances and Charms Us  
... but it's not enough to save an empty show



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