

Tuneful 'Irma' provides wit

By JANET ODELL

Ah, Paris in the spring . . . but not the Paris seen by the average middle class tourist. In "Irma La

Douce," the Birmingham Village Players transport the audience to a seedier area of the city, Pigalle. Peopled by prostitutes, pimps,

criminals and thrill seekers, this is a part of the city where one character says, "There is no love of law, but there is a law of love."

Love here is a cheap commodity, easily purchased from any of the ladies of the streets, like Irma La Douce, or Coco, around whom the musical revolves. Although she has a soft heart and gets personally involved with some of her clients, she is underneath a business woman. According to the code, she takes pride in supporting her man.

But to this reviewer, Peg Kropshot plays the part of Irma in too low a key. I have only admiration and praise for her singing and dancing ability, both a delight to hear and see.

The "Dis Done" song and dance sequence in Act I is excellent. But I kept straining for Irma to be more alive in her dramatic scenes. A spark was missing.

Boris Sellers has a difficult part as both Irma's young lover and her wealthy aged lover. As the first, he too, starts out with too little fire. But as he changes from one character to the other (and there is one scene where he is changing from minute to minute), he shows his extensive acting capabilities. I thought him better as M'sieur Oscar, the older man. The scene where he "murders" Oscar is priceless.

Duncan Jones, as narrator, moves the play along smoothly.

"Irma" has witty dialogue and memorable tunes. Principals and chorus members sing their words distinctly which is both pleasure and necessity when songs sometimes further the plot. And the five-piece orchestra knows its function—to accompany, not drown out the singers. Priscilla Benson directs the music.

The program does not list the artist who created the nude painting in the bar scene. He or she will never be invited to exhibit it in the Royal Academy, but it is the perfect touch.

Kudos also to the designers and

builders of the set showing the Hotel Rapid and Irma's room. Spontaneous applause greeted its first appearance.

The plot of the play is a little hard to believe, but plays are magic and anything can happen. Escape from Devil's Island and eventual arrival in Paris—via rowboat, yet—contradicts all common sense.

Just accept it along with music that sets you humming, a cast that is having fun and a play that is entertaining.

Isabel Himelhoch and Marjorie direct this last production of the season at the Village Playhouse. Additional performances are scheduled for Thursday (May 9), Friday and Saturday with curtain time 9 p.m.



'Irma La Douce'

Gendarme Max Maksymetz seems to approve of the romantic overtures of Boris Sellers toward Irma La Douce, played by Peg Kropshot. The show continues Friday and Saturday at the Village Players theater, 475 S. Hunter, Birmingham. Tickets can be reserved by calling 644-2075.

Down to earth

Spring flowers showing color

Everybody will agree forsythia has outdone itself this spring to give golden beauty. Last year we had a very poor show of flowers due to the false show of spring on a December date in 1972.

The buds for spring flowering began to form in September and once in a while Mother Nature will botch up the schedule and have a warm spell in the winter cycle. This will mean the buds are frozen after swelling and will be killed by the resuming of the cold weather.

Earthworms can mean different things to different people. The fisherman likes to use them for bait. The gardeners like them because of their role of aerating the soil, plus adding fertilizer. You know when you turn over earth and see earthworms that the soil is rich. They only will stay where the soil is good.

Did you know the earthworms have a homing instinct and will return to his initial habitat if you move him to another part of the garden? If you have a compost pile and wish to attract worms, onion tops will be good. Worms also like dandelions.

NEW IDEAS: Wyman's Garden Encyclopedia says if you wish to prolong the life of a rose once it has been plucked you pour boiling water around the stem and after a few minutes plunge the rose stem



By ALICE WESSELLS BURLINGAME

in cold water. We know that leaves below the water line should be stripped and the stem cut on a slant.

The best time to cut flowers in the garden is in the afternoon after they have had a chance to benefit from the nutrients during the day. Those flowers which have milky juices should be singed and then immediately placed in deep water in a cool place for a few hours.

"Gardening With Wild Flowers," a handbook from the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, 1000 Washington Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11225, 95 pages, \$1.50 is a terrific guidebook for you to have in your permanent garden library.

THESE PUBLICATIONS are "tops" and the multitude of illustrations will guide you to prepare, plant and enjoy wild flowers in your garden orbit. The following chapters will aid you to achieve a greater appreciation of wild flowers. Wild plants in a terrarium, seeds of wild flowers, native ferns in a garden, retail nursery sources, wild flower preserves to visit, etc. If you have a shady garden this manual is especially written for you.

A TIP FOR THE WISE: An apple a day does help to keep the doctor away. For more than three years 500 Michigan State University students ate an apple every day. They made one-third fewer medical calls to the health center for treatment of colds and upper respiratory infections.

Original ballets planned at school

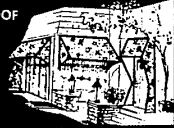
The Doris Rapport School of Ballet will stage two original ballets Saturday and Sunday in the West Bloomfield High School Auditorium. "Ballet de Exercise" and "Ballet with Many Faces" will be staged at 8:20 p.m. Saturday and 3:10 p.m. Sunday.

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