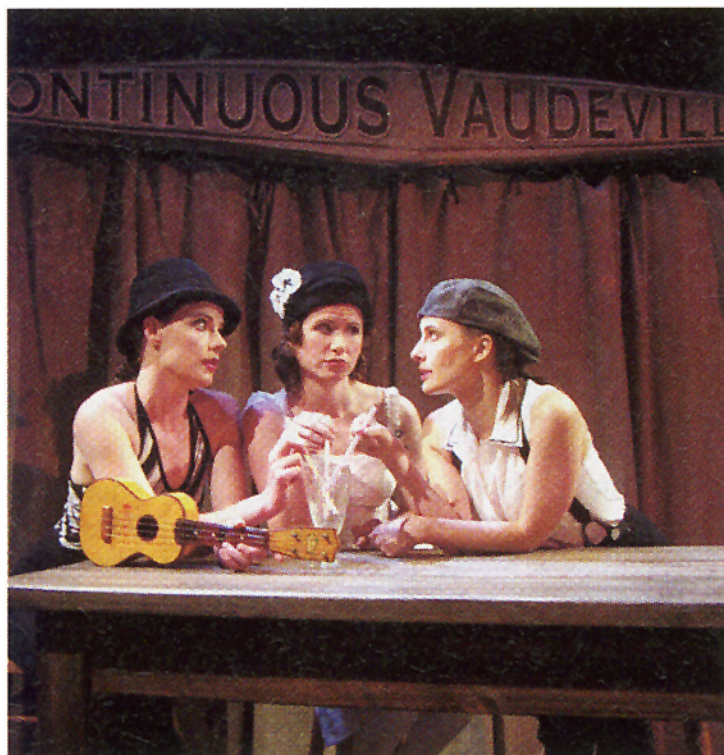


Big Times

By Mia Barron, Maggie Lacey and Danielle Skraastad. Dir. Leigh Silverman. With Barron, Lacey, Skraastad. WalkerSpace (see Off-Off Broadway).

The three vaudeville ladies at the fast-pumping heart of *Big Times* may not have much in the way of money—or talent, for that matter—but darned if they don't have their dreams. Nellie (the sparky, off-kilter Barron) is an orphan with Jimmy Durante gumption; Sadie (the droll Lacey) is a dim, dimpled lamb; Lucy (the strapping Skraastad) is a burlesque dancer, one tough cookie but sweet in the middle. Yearning to escape their small-town lives, they make their way to New York City, hoping to be booked on the vaudeville circuit...for a career playing small towns.

The fun of this irrepressible pastiche begins in the lobby of WalkerSpace, where a concession girl hands out free bags of popcorn, and drinks (from egg creams to cocktails) are for sale at bargain prices. Zippily directed by Leigh Silverman, *Big Times* takes time to find its footing; but with help from an enchantingly nostalgic score by the Moonlighters, it steadily gains momentum.



FINAL STRAWS Skraastad, Lacey and Barron, from left, fall on hard times in New York.

The talented writer-performers play their multiple roles with zest, slinging jokes at a ping-pong pace—as in this Burns-and-Allen-style exchange:

Sadie: I got fired.

Landlady: You got fired? Again?

Sadie: [*louder*] I got fired.

Such banter is delivered with a friendly wink of irony, of course, but the cast ultimately wins our affection through the same kind of showbiz charm that it joshes. As Barron, Lacey and Skraastad race through their routines, one feels the infectious enthusiasm of three gutsy dames putting on a show.

—Adam Feldman