**Cracked Ice**

By Andy Propst • Apr 29, 2009 • New York

Given the constant headlines about the country's continued economic woes and a potential flu pandemic, a little fun really is the order of the day. Luckily, some much-needed theatrical zaniness can be had at Jennifer Miller's *Cracked Ice, or the Jewels of the Forbidden Skates*, a drag vaudeville noir now at P.S. 122.

The 90-minute show is set in Eddie's Rhinestone Cabaret where the Liberty Sisters -- Sybil (Miller) and Statua (Carlton Cyrus Ward) -- are the headliners. They have dreams of transforming their act -- a wild mélange of juggling, dancing and saucily passé political humor -- into an ice spectacle. However, Sybil has invested everything they have -- including Statua's prized Dorothy Hamill skirt collection -- with Bernie Madoff (Rae C. Wright), but he's lost it all.

Not surprisingly, Sybil goes on a blind rampage trying to find Bernie, but finds herself strangely drawn to Tom (also played by Wright), a plumber at the club. Statua also finds herself embroiled in a love affair with Bernadette (Wright as well -- get the picture?) a new performer at Eddie's. Meanwhile, a pair of Dutch kids (played by the inestimable Wau Wau Sisters) is also looking for Bernie; he's their long-lost dad and they're also destitute.

The hide-and-seek farce that develops with the characters is smartly punctuated by deliciously frivolous sketches on stage at the club. The Wau Wau Sisters reappear as a pair of raunchy and very funny country western singers with a bit-too-strong attachment to one another. Conceptual artist Flo (Salley May, who looks a bit like an ostrich on silver glitter platform shoes) delivers a hysterically surreal dance routine involving mechanical birds and feather boas. As for the Liberty Sisters themselves, one of their zippiest routines is a song that's made up entirely of tongue-twisters.

The clever tunes and lyrics are from Kenny Mellman -- who's also on hand as the Cabaret pianist -- whose invaluable contributions include the folk anthem that morphs into polka played by Novice Theory on the accordion. Meanwhile, Obie Award winner Deb Margolin has crafted a series of Spalding Gray-like monologues for Bernie, which cuttingly comments on the financier's arrogance and greed -- and which Wright delivers with frightening forthrightness. An appearance from another of Madoff's "victims," Alexandra Penny (played by Lee Houck), the author of *How To Make Love to Your Man*, only underscores the commentary about gender roles that's at the heart of this cross-dressing spree.

As the plot twists and turns, the homespun production (which includes a clever set and a host of blissfully tacky costumes from Jonathan Berger) can lose focus. But just as the piece seems to have entirely lost its forward
momentum, it rights itself, inducing laughter and smiles. And before the show has concluded, Miller and company conspire to create a happy ending for most of the folks at Eddie's Rhinestone Cabaret, sending audiences away with the knowledge that a certain amount of merriment can generally be found in even the direst of times.