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Three 'Angels' have onstage chemistry fit for Broadway

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The person who originated the phrase "The show must go on" didn't know Meghan Andrews, Merideth Kaye Clark or Kelli Maguire, but they know the meaning.

Without the audience's awareness, two of the three adroitly zipped through a number in "Honky Tonk Angels" after Maguire began choking on a pork rind.

The production, which ends its monthlong run at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival on Sunday, is a musical comedy, but it was no laughing matter when Maguire didn't swallow all of one bite. Her partners knew it immediately.

In the scene, the three were on a "bus" headed for Nashville and anticipated fame when the pork rind created an unexpected glitch before a preview audience.

"I wasn't turning blue or anything, but they could see the look of panic on my face," said Maguire, who plays a housewife with six kids, a six-pack-loving husband and a dream of becoming a star one day.

Andrews and Clark didn't miss a beat and began singing two-part harmony instead of three on "Paradise Road" as Maguire stayed in character while she recovered. **At another performance, a roller-skating Clark was on stage by herself when she stumbled, followed by a skillful glide toward the edge of the stage.**

In a perfectly timed ad-lib, she told front row patrons not to worry because she wasn't about to join them.

With thousands of talented actresses, dancers and singers vying for attention around the country, it takes something special to attract the interest of those who create and direct Broadway and second-tier theatrical productions.

It was evident to those who came up with "Angels" that Andrews, Clark and Maguire had what it took, even though they live in New York and didn't grow up in the South where honky-tonks are part of the scenery, especially on Saturday nights.

When they sat down for their first reading of the script as a prelude to actual rehearsals, they knew they had the perfect chemistry to make "Angels" a hit. That's not always the case in some productions and changes have to be made to provide the right mix, especially when there are only three performers on stage.

Amateur productions can be fun and frightening and, as someone who directed "Harvey" and "Butterflies Are Free" in Decatur many years ago, I can attest to the problems of trying to get it done without loss of sanity. Professional productions aren't like that and the three young women who sparkle in "Angels" have pleased audiences since the first performance on Aug. 6.

They've performed in front of more than 10,000 people during the past month. When the show ends with Sunday's matinee, they will have left behind vivid memories for theatergoers while creating lasting friendships at the same time. Andrews and Clark will be singing together at a New York bistro in a few weeks and Maguire plans to be on hand to cheer them on as the three get ready for their next full-time gigs. They've had extensive experience in live theater and Andrews once had a few lines in an episode of "Law and Order," one of television's most revered shows. "It was before I went to college and I played a young girl who owns a horse that is murdered," she said, adding the "hit" had a Mafia connection. Performing in towns far from Broadway provides different atmospheres as well as audiences. The three "Angels" who portray country girls has also done Shakespeare. In Montgomery, they've had a chance to see the sights and sounds of a unique town with lots of history and activities. "I went to see a Biscuits game once," said Andrews, who smiled when she remembered the favorable impression she had made on a woman who worked at the souvenir shop. "She said she really liked the play and me." That's the kind of reaction that makes live theater wonderful, whether it's in New York or "way, way" off Broadway" as is the case in Montgomery. Biscuit players and the three "Angels" are professionals, but they also are aware that they're in the minor leagueshoping to hit the big time one day. It takes special talentathletic as well as theatricalto play in Yankee Stadium or at the Majestic Theater. Andrews, Clark and Maguire have it. Alvin Benn writes about people and places in central and south Alabama. If you have suggestions for a story, contact him at 334-875-3249 or e-mail him at benn8071@bellsouth.net.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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