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San Francisco Trio Sings At the Ballroom

The singing trio of Julie Nicholas, Sheilah Glover and Willow Wray, at the Ballroom as part of an invasion of the East from their base in San Francisco, are as much a theatrical production as they are a vocal group.

The three women cover a wide and unusual range of material from period pieces such as the singing style of the Boswell sisters in the 1930's and the songs of Connie Francis in the 1950's, crisply articulated jazz songs ("Freedom Jazz Dance") and a carefully developed treatment of a contemporary cabaret song, Blossom Dearie's "Inside a Silent Tear."

That repertory alone would provide the basis for a strong and varied cabaret act, particularly with the polish and flair that the three women bring to their solo and ensemble singing. But they also have original material that sets them apart from any other singing trio past or present. The material is essentially character sketches that demand imaginative presentation to be effective. One piece that is brilliantly realized is Miss Wray's warm, wry portrait of a fat girl for which all three women wear masks that are fat versions of their own faces, producing an effect that is initially comic but, as the song develops, touching.

On the other hand, Miss Glover's sketch of three elderly, lonesome women has a similar potential that is undercut because the three singers look too young and sound too young. It needs the kind of imaginative device that puts the fat girls in context.

The singers are backed by an instrumental trio led by an energetically swinging pianist, Joyce Imbesi, that adds tremendous verve to their jazz numbers.

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