

# Ashlie Atkinson: Long Island Knew Her When

By Iris Wiener

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Ashlie Atkinson, current star of Broadway's *The Ritz*, has been Long Island's 'litle engine that could' ever since she got people talking when she starred in 2005's Off-Broadway production of *Fat Pig*.

*The Long Islander* was the first Long Island publication to print an interview with her, and she then went on to visit local students in an effort to discuss self-image and the trials and tribulations involved with being a plus-size woman in the entertainment industry. *Kidsday* later ran a feature about her local appearance, immediately before she graced the cover of *Figure Magazine*.

Fast forward to 2007, and Atkinson is balancing her role as Broadway's newest leading lady, as well as a hectic film shoot on a little film known as....*Sex and the City: The Movie*. Despite the quick change in the scope of Atkinson's career, she remains humble, sincere and when it comes to her quirks, brutally honest.

"When I was going in to meet the cast of *The Ritz* at Studio 54 [the theatre in which the play is running], I was trying to



Ashlie Atkinson, current star of Broadway's *The Ritz*, shares a little about Broadway and a little about the big screen.

have this very magical moment as I was walking through the frosted glass doors that say Studio 54 on them," she laughs. "I

was thinking, 'Oh, this is so cool, this is so cool,' and I tried to push through the doors, and I couldn't, and the security

guard says, 'Uh, that's a pull door.' Well, so much for me trying to make a big moment for myself."

However, after earning the role of the sassy, yet emotional Vivian Proclo with only two days left until the opening of the show, *The Ritz* brought Atkinson many magical moments. When she is not on-stage opposite Rosie Perez, Kevin Chamberlain, and Brooks Ashmanskas, she can be found hunting for some of the infamous money left behind at Studio 54 from the seventies, when Steve Rubell owned the joint.

"We're all convinced that there's money that was hidden back in the day," she jokes. "Every now and again when we go into a part of the building where we've never been before we keep an eye out. I'm walking around downstairs tapping, listening for a hollow joint in the wall..."

*The Ritz* marks Atkinson's debut in a farce, a fact about which she is very excited. "I had never done a farce before, so I wasn't too familiar with the style, but it's one of those things that you pick up as you go," she explained. "There are very skilled farce technicians and wonderful actors in this show with me, and I just sort of took

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# Ashlie puts on *The Ritz*

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whatever lessons I could and tried to incorporate it into what I was doing.”

Along with her enormous talent, Atkinson’s versatility and outgoing nature have largely contributed to her most famous small screen roles as well. When she visited Long Island in 2005, she spoke to students about her six-episode stint on TNT’s “Rescue Me.”

“This fantastic teacher friend of mine hooked me up with some local students, so I got to go in and talk to the kids about body image, which I feel like, especially for girls that age is a really, really important topic, and I found the students to be engaged, smart, savvy and receptive,” she recalled. “It really made it a pleasant experience for me, and I will never forget the positive experiences I have had with the local arts community and drama students.”

Atkinson will soon be sharing the big screen with some of New York’s hottest ladies in a role for which any actress would kill. In *Sex and the City: The Movie*, Atkinson can be found opposite Sarah Jessica Parker as a *New York Post* columnist named Elaine.

“I have a few scenes. There’s a Mercedes Benz fashion show sequence which was so much fun, Lil’ Kim was there, got to hang out with her for a little bit. And the ladies themselves are

delightful. To meet them and have them treat you as an equal is really incredible, mind-boggling. Especially because, in some ways, this is a very infantilizing industry,” she said. “To walk on and see them working and in control, and have nothing but kind words for the people around them is just really heartening.”

While Atkinson looks forward to the release of the anticipated film, she’s enjoying her time at *The Ritz*.

“It’s a really funny show, and despite having been written more than 30 years ago, it still contains a great basic message, in that, farces are all about misunderstanding. You misunderstand messages, you don’t recognize someone for who they are, you make assumptions that are wrong, and it all gets resolved. This show is all about thinking you know who someone is, and learning that they’re a lot more than that. The performances are gleeful,” she said.

*The Ritz* is one of the few shows unaffected by the stagehand strike, and Atkinson couldn’t be happier.

“We have such a great time doing the show every single night! It’s a really funny, lighthearted piece. I don’t think there’s anything like it on Broadway right now,” Atkinson explained. “It’s a straight play with music, and period music from the seventies, and it’s also a great celebration of our differences.”