

STAGE

# YOU NEVER KNOW WHO MIGHT DROP IN

## Open-mic Cast Party draws stars from the Strip and beyond

[ BY SARAH FELDBERG ]

→ "Well, that was disappointing," says Jim Caruso.

A round of laughter rises from the audience while we're still basking in the glow of *Lion King* performer Moya Angela's rendition of "I Am Changing" from *Dreamgirls*. I turn to a friend. "It would suck to follow that."

So Caruso, the creator of insider open-mic night Cast Party, does it himself. It's the musical-theater equivalent of taking one for the team. "You have to kind of burst that bubble before you announce the next person after somebody kills like that," Caruso explains to me later. The perfect number? Laurence O'Keefe's "The Sensitive Song," from *Cops: The Musical*. By the time he sings the last line of "skanky whores" we're laughing, drinking and ready for whoever is coming up next.

In the eight years since Caruso created Cast Party at Birdland Jazz Club in Manhattan, the drop-in show has featured some of the biggest names on Broadway taking the stage alongside accompanist Billy Stritch, to sing whatever they're in the mood for. "We've had Liza Minnelli, Tony Bennett, Martin Short, Jon Bon Jovi, up and coming Broadway kids, composers, incredible jazz musicians ..."

In August, Caruso brought Cast Party to Vegas for the first time, inviting local entertainers to a ballroom at the Alexis Park for a pair of weeknight performances. This



> **PASSING THE MIC** Jim Caruso's Cast Party feel's more like a living room show than a theater.

month he's back for a second round. There are no costumes, no sets, no orchestra—just a small stage, a single piano and a handful of microphones for an informal showcase where everyone knows everyone and most people spend their nights in stage makeup.

"It's like coming into somebody's living room and just eavesdropping," Caruso explains. "It's a party. It's a shmooze. It's a time to catch up with other performers."

And for those of us with day jobs and desks, it's a chance to peek inside the insular world of entertainment. On the second night of Cast Party's August run

Broadway veteran Mimi Hines was in the crowd. The tiny 78-year-old actress and singer, who replaced Barbra Streisand in *Funny Girl*, stepped carefully onstage as the room quieted. Then she belted up to the mic and "just killed everyone dead," as Caruso tells it.

I couldn't help but think, it would really suck to follow that.

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**CAST PARTY** September 22, doors at 9 p.m., show at 10 p.m., \$40 non-locals, \$25 locals. Alexis Park, 800-838-3006, [brownpapertickets.com](http://brownpapertickets.com).

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