



NITESIDE

Shedding light on life after dark

BY BROOKE NIEMEYER

NiteTalk: Showbiz Boss Jim Caruso Dishes to Niteside

Showbiz boss **Jim Caruso** is the host of his own show, **Cast Party**, the Monday night soiree at Birdland, just steps away from the Broadway lights. But his involvement in the entertainment biz doesn't stop there. He toured with the legendary **Liza Minnelli** and performed at **President Clinton's** first state dinner. He released a new studio album this month, which is currently in the top 100 Vocal Jazz albums on Amazon. Caruso gave a glimpse into his world when he sat down with Niteside this weekend.



What was your favorite part of creating your latest album, "The Swing Set?"

Having it finished and in my very hands. (laughs) No, the choosing of the music was exciting. I've never done a studio recording before. I've done live CDs, so this was really a whole new experience. I wanted it to certainly have a jazz feel with the great American standards but added some quirky songs because I think that's what people, if they think of me at all, think of me doing. We found some unique and funny tunes. It's like what we do at Cast Party – having a lot of friends entertaining each other at the piano. That's kind of the feeling I wanted on this album.

Let's talk about Cast Party. You've had some legendary guests, but who would you label as your favorite?

There have been some really historic moments there. The lyricist Betty Comden, of Comden and Green, made her last public appearance with us. She came wearing

all black and diamonds and she looked fantastic. She motioned to Billy Stritch, who was at the piano, and said, 'Do you think it would be okay if I sang a song?' And of course we fainted. We got her right up and she sang 'One Hundred Easy Ways to Lose a Man' from "Wonderful Town," which she wrote with Adolph Green and Leonard Bernstein. She remembered every word and was hilarious and got every laugh. She died within the next year. That was something I'll never forget. And of course every time Liza comes, it's pandemonium. People freak out and she sings her head off. That's a woman that can stop a room.

Is there anyone you'd like to come perform that hasn't yet?

I do have a short list of people that I'm desperate to get in to Cast Party. They were my heroes growing up – Dick Van Dyke and Carol Burnett – I just know they'd love it. I have a feeling that Ricky Martin would really be into it. He has show business in his blood. Kathy Griffin is somebody that I know pretty well and I think she'd find it hilarious.

Tell me about working with Liza Minnelli.

Oh Liza Minnelli...I could talk about her forever. I was on the road for three years with Liza in the show that became 'Liza's at the Palace,' which won the Tony. Nobody has been kinder and more supportive of me and my career than that lady. She's extraordinary. If you have her as a friend, you've really got a friend.

What's next for you?

We are doing a Very Special Cast Party at Town Hall on February 17. It's going to be a benefit for Broadway Cares and a crazy great evening. Billy Stritch and I are also going to do Cast Party in Los Angeles in March and that's one of my favorite things to do. I love taking Cast Party on the road and celebrating local talent, which can range from Carol Channing to a songwriter you've never heard of who blows you away. That's really exciting to me to be able to celebrate fabulous talent and to get to know these shockingly talented people all over the country. It's like having my own "Ed Sullivan Show."