



A typical New York nightclub might promote their open mic evenings by reminding patrons that they never know when they might wind up seeing the next Liza Minnelli. Over at Birdland, attendees at Jim Caruso's Monday night open mic known as [Cast Party](#) never know when they might wind up seeing the current Liza Minnelli... or Chita Rivera... or Christine Ebersole... or any number of Broadway, cabaret or jazz luminaries who are known to stop by on occasion to do a number.

Last week's second edition of *The Best of Jim Caruso's Cast Party*, produced at Town Hall by Scott Siegel as a benefit for The Actors Fund, had its share of star wattage - Linda Lavin and Marilyn Maye were among the guest performers - but the show's flippant personality is always defined by the chemistry between comic and vocalist Caruso and his right-hand man at piano, Billy Stritch.

Stritch, of course, is among the finest arranger/music director/pianist/vocalists working the cabarets. His low-key, genial cool slickly plays off Caruso's wisecracking charm whether they're engaged in a breezy swing arrangement of "When Duke Was King" or trading quips between acts. ("If the room were smaller we'd be packed.")

Joining the duo were nightlife regulars Tom Hubbard on bass and Daniel Glass on drums, playing for a lineup that included Julia Murney, Terri Klausner, Liz Mikel, Jane Monheit and Janis Siegel. Laura Osnes was joined by composer Frank Wildhorn to play his and Leslie Bricusse's *Jekyll & Hyde* favorite "Someone Like You," and Stephanie J. Block was accompanied by composer Paul Loesel for his and Scott Burkell's hilarious first date patter song, "Invention."

Just like on Ed Sullivan's weekly program, there were fun novelty acts like rock star juggler Marcus Monroe, who kept rings, balls, clubs and knives flying, and "acromedian" Rudi Macaggi, who began his act doing back flips, somersaults and splits in a padded suit while lip-syncing to Pavarotti.

Legit opera star Paulo Szot ended the evening with Rodgers and Hammerstein's "This Nearly Was Mine." No back flips were required.