

LAS VEGAS SUN

By [John Katsilometes](#)

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We might not need it, given the torridity of the climate, but VegasVille is about to receive a ray of sunlight in the form of Jim Caruso.



Mr. Sunshine, that's Caruso, a New Yorker who is such a huge fan of our city that he jokes about singing himself into "Vegas Throat" so he can return home to brag to his friends about the condition. "Guess what I have! Vegas Throat!" Like that.

A popular nightclub performer who appeared on Broadway with Liza Minnelli in "Liza! At the Palace," Caruso has been hosting what is known as Cast Party for the past decade at Birdland Jazz Club in Manhattan. The weekly party is a late-night showcase where Caruso invites to the stage the likes of Linda Lavin, Chita Rivera, Carol Channing, Joel Gray, Martin Short, Paul Shaffer and scads of other noteworthy stars.

Minnelli's longtime pianist Billy Stritch is posted at the piano and those who arrive "after theater" hop onstage and sing whatever song comes to mind. As Caruso says, "Jazz, cabaret, folk, funk, pop, rock, roll, didgeridoo, harp, marching band, a cappella ... *ventriloquial*," are all welcomed at Cast Party.

Caruso has long attempted to stage a version of "Cast Party" in Vegas. In August he put on two shows at Alexis Park (where Donny Osmond was among the performers to turn out) that were great fun even in a fairly crummy venue. Caruso is back at a far more suitable hall, Cabaret Jazz at the Smith Center, for a one-night-only staging of Cast Party set for 9:30 p.m. Wednesday (tickets are \$20 and \$30 and available on the [Smith Center website](#)).

"I know it will be a blast," Caruso said with great confidence during a phone conversation this week. "There will be some terrific talent."

Those who are "persons of interest" in the show include Susan Anton, Mark Shunock of "Rock of Ages" (who is about wearing out our city since he arrived in December), Clint Holmes and Kelly Clinton-Holmes, Eric Jordan Young and Tara Palsha (both of "Vegas! The Show"), vocal groups 5th Avenue and Dangerous Curves, Tina Walsh (late of "Phantom – The Las Vegas Spectacular"), members of "Jersey Boys," Frankie Moreno, and onetime "Jersey Boys" cast member Erich Bergen.

"I would be happy to tell you everyone who has expressed interest is guaranteed to show up, but it's an open-mic night and you never know who want to get onstage and sing," Caruso said. "But we have had a lot of very good response."

Cast Party is unlike the regular Composers Showcase, hosted for years by "Jersey Boys" music director Keith Thompson, in that the format is almost entirely improv. Thompson, who stages his shows almost monthly at Cab Jazz, likes a solid and well-thought-out list of performers. That is not the case for Caruso's loosely assembled format.

Both productions are similar in that they are held at Cab Jazz and feature Vegas performers out of their usual forums, but there is no overt competition between the two factions. Thompson is actually a supporter of Cast Party, and verification of that support is that he is planning to perform Wednesday night.

How did the show vault from Alexis Park to Smith Center? Caruso and Stritch are friendly with Smith Center President Myron Martin — Stritch and Martin have known each other since both lived in Houston, ages ago — and Martin has seen Cast Party performances at Birdland. There is a possibility the show will find a recurring home in Vegas. There is already a Cast Party set for October at Cabaret Jazz.

"I am just blown away by the space," said Caruso, who in April performed a scaled-down version of Cast Party onstage at Reynolds Hall during a performance for Smith Center Chairman's Dinner gala. "If we could do this four times a year, that would be great. I know we have the talent to pull that off."