

Jim Caruso's

# Cast Party

**W**hen you've traveled to the Big Apple numerous times, it seems familiar. Yet, after each trip, another gem is discovered that surprises and delights. Last month's treasure was the famous Birdland Jazz Club, 315W 44th Street. I feel remiss since it's an iconic club. Anyone who is or was someone has performed at or frequented this venue.

**O**n Monday nights, something special happens. Birdland has hosted for 13 years Jim Caruso's "Cast Party." ([castpartynyc.com](http://castpartynyc.com)) When Broadway is dark, it's an open mike evening of the finest singers in New York. Often stars, the caliber of Tony Bennett, Paul Shaffer, or Liza Minnelli grace the stage for a couple of

selections. Cabaret and musical theatre hopefuls perform. They may not be celebrities, but they could easily compete in any Broadway musical.

*Cast Party* is akin to the best karaoke ever...on steroids!

The power of the club is Jim Caruso, a suave, impeccably dressed crooner in his own right. This guy has gravitas, a showman extraordinaire, He wields a quick rapier wit, and a voice so smooth you would give him your wallet, if only he asked. Jim glides from the bar to the stage introducing his next guest. Every person within reaching distance is lightly touched, or receives smiles, as he massages the emotions of everyone in the house. He reminds you

of the best variety show host of yesteryear. Sometimes his words are amusing, and then scalpel sharp toward any trying to move the show off course.

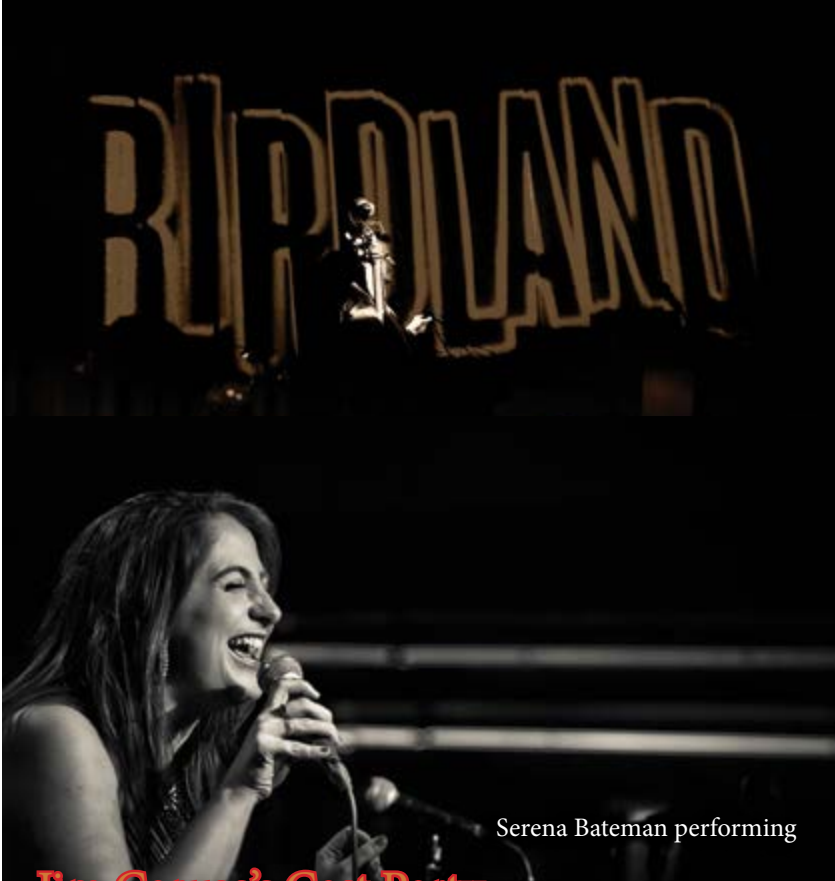
I would characterize Jim as a "Psychologist of Entertainment." (PhD. of Ent.) Soon the incredibly talented singers are a distraction. I prefer to witness how Jim interacts with his next guest. At *Cast Party* there's never dead air or loss of momentum, as anxious performers navigate

L-R, Serena Bateman at the mic, Grammy Award Winner Billy Stritch and later, Jim Caruso sharing an anecdote.



Photos: Joan Bateman Cowan

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Serena Bateman performing

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through the audience of 150 to the stage. Forget that excruciating lag time artists create providing music to the piano, Jim segues with non-stop jokes and antidotes with the audience, then good natured banter with pianist Billy Stritch. They reminded me of Johnny Carson and Ed McMahon.

**B**illy is a Grammy award winner and long time musical director of Liza Minnelli. He effortlessly plays any and all music presented to him by the 25 odd guests on any given Monday night. Occasionally he sings back-up to support or harmonize. This taste only stimulates listeners yearning to hear more from this seasoned performer. Steve Doyle accompanies on bass, and Daniel Glass rounds off the band on drums. The music generated by these three instruments is awe inspiring. It would be worth the \$25.00 cover and \$10.00 food minimum, just to hear these guys jam. By the way, the food is good!

If you are in Las Vegas, Miami, Los Angeles, London, Chicago, Boston, Pittsburg, or Dallas, look for the local Cast Party. Jim travels to those locations and finds the hottest venue. Then he locates the best singers in those cities. He recruits and networks and another *Cast Party* is born. I asked him why he does this non-stop. His answer was that it started as a job, then it became about celebrating people.

Jim Caruso has toured the world performing with legends in the music industry. He has done and seen it all. When he tells me it's really about that next great talent needing a chance, waiting to be recognized, I believe him.

No Monday night is the same...except for the applause.

- Scott Cowan