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# Liza "Rings Them Bells"

## Classic Special Comes to DVD

BY PAUL BROGAN

Once upon a time there were television specials that were indeed special. Musical performers such as Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, Ella Fitzgerald, Doris Day, Perry Como and Barbra Streisand brought their enormous talents to the small screen for evenings of musical entertainment that were indeed worthy of the word "special."

One evening in 1972, a relative newcomer graced the "tube" for an hour of music and dance that delighted millions and who went on to win a truckload of Emmy Awards.

"Liza with a 'Z'" was the name of the special, and the lady of the title was Liza Minnelli, daughter of Judy Garland and renowned director Vincente Minnelli; and at the time of the broadcast receiving kudos for her superstar turn in the film version of *Cabaret*. The role would eventually win her an Oscar.

Legendary dancer/choreographer Bob Fosse, who directed "Cabaret," also helmed this spectacular and his "touch" would become a distinctive part of the Minnelli oeuvre for years to come. Finally, fabled designer Halston created Minnelli's outfits for the show that played an enormous

part in defining Liza Minnelli throughout the 70's and 80's; the two names became intertwined in the public's mind.

was the year in which Liza made her international mark as a true superstar of the first caliber. This was before the multiple mar-

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I watched "Liza with a 'Z'" back in 1972. I was a teenager at the time and had never seen it again until its recent release on DVD. As I faced the prospect of seeing it again after more than three decades, I wondered whether it would be as good as I remembered it. After all, it was one of those magical evenings that you stored away and compared other specials to in the years following.

To my delight, I found it to be as fresh, funny and musically uplifting as I recalled, and thanks to some great re-mastering for this release, even better to look at.

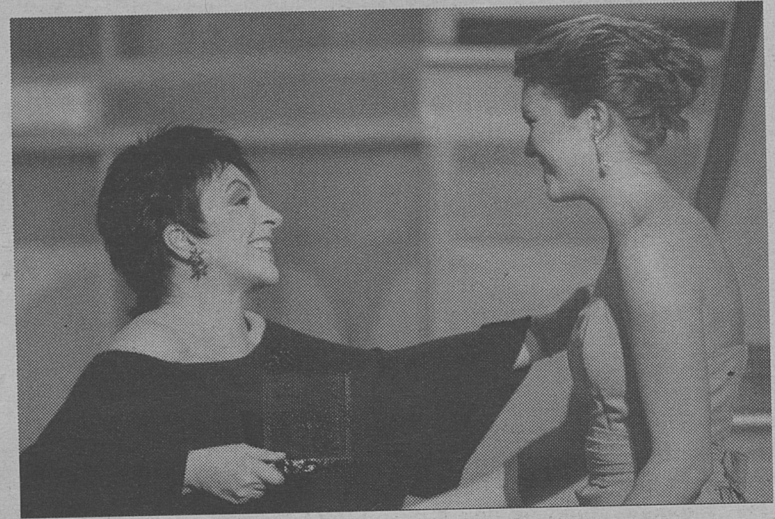
I was instantly struck by how young and unaffected Liza seemed to be at 26 years of age. Although she had already starred on Broadway, made several films, including her Oscar-nominated role in *The Sterile Cuckoo*, 1972

riages, frequent trips to rehab, Broadway shows like "The Act" and "The Rink" which ran only because of her starring in them, and forgettable films like *Lucky Lady*, *A Matter of Time*, and *Rent a Cop*.

"Liza with a 'Z'" offers us a veritable dynamo whose energy will leave the viewer breathless.

While not blessed with an extraordinary voice - she was certainly no Garland or Streisand - what Minnelli does possess is showmanship. She has that in abundance and few performers can grab an audience the way she can, bringing them to their feet not because you are supposed to stand up as audiences do today, but because the performer has treated you to a consummate musical experience.

Liza runs the gamut of songs during the special, including



Pop singer Mandy Moore (right) presents Liza with The Vanguard Award at GLAAD's 16th Annual Media Awards. LIMELITE.ORG

some unlikely numbers such as "God Bless the Child" and "Son of a Preacher Man," which she makes her own. "It was a Good Time," based on the theme from the David Lean film, *Ryan's Daughter*, is such a toe-tapper that one wonders why it wasn't heard more often. She even channels her mother with a show-stopping "My Mammy."

Fred Ebb and John Kander (*Cabaret* and *Chicago*) contribute some great original tunes that Minnelli sings to the delight of the audience. The hilarious "Liza With a 'Z'" and the brilliant "Ring Them Bells" allow Minnelli to show her comedy-timing which was often given short shrift in her frequent overly-melodramatic

choices for film roles. She ties it all up with a medley from *Cabaret* that settles any questions as to the validity of her win as Best Actress for the film.

"Liza With a 'Z'" should be required viewing for anyone with an appreciation for quality entertainment. Add it to your collection and I can guarantee you it will spend more time in your DVD player than on the shelf. "What good is sitting alone in your room when you can be watching Liza's finest hour?" ▼

➔ Paul Brogan is executive director of A Community Resource Network in Lebanon, New Hampshire.

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