

LIZA

From page 1

“Look for the Silver Lining.”

So it should come as no surprise that Liza Minnelli – daughter of Judy Garland and Vincente Minnelli – grew up to be an imposing theatrical figure in her own right, a triple threat, singing, dancing, acting. It seems almost inevitable.

But the 62-year-old Minnelli has her doubts.

“I don’t know,” Minnelli says from her home in New York City. “I don’t think everybody whose parents are famous are talented. There are a lot fewer of us. We’re not the norm, we’re the exceptions.”

And though she had nature and nurture working in her favor, as well as multiple generations in show biz on both sides of the family, initially she wasn’t interested, she says.

“Well, I didn’t want to do anything my parents did,” she explains. “They were living in Hollywood. When you’re a kid and you’re watching a movie being made, it’s really boring. They have to do it over and over and over again. But what I liked to do was hang out in the dance rehearsal halls, where I could watch people dancing. So that’s what I wanted to be, a dancer. And then I decided I was going to become an ice skater.”

Until she saw her first Broadway musical.

“I had my heart set on being an ice skater, and then I saw ‘Bye Bye Birdie,’ and I thought, ‘Wait a minute, that looks like fun! I want to go on Broadway. Maybe that’s better than being an ice skater, you know.’”

And she did wind up on Broadway. Though she had appearances on her mom’s TV show and sang with her at sold-out shows in London’s Paladium, she received a Tony Award at 19 years old for her performance in “Flora the Red Menace.” The show was Kander and Ebb’s first Broadway musical and the start of a long, happy relationship with the songwriting duo. They went on to write the music for “Cabaret,” “New York, New York” and “Chicago.”

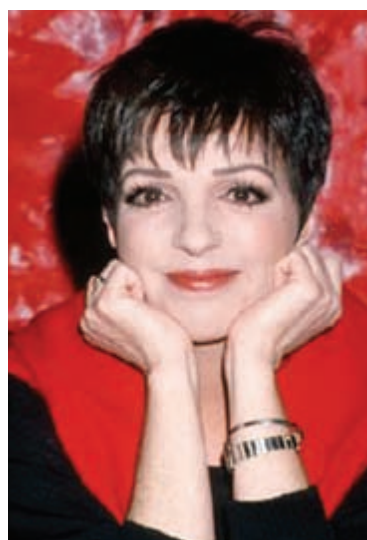
“They’re wonderful, wonderful artists,” Minnelli says of the two. (Fred Ebb died in 2004.) “One of the greatest talents I have is finding people who are more talented than I am, and learning from them. And I think of all the stuff that I do, I am most proud of the music that has been written for me.”

Kander and Ebb wrote many songs for Minnelli, including “Liza with a ‘Z,’” because so many people would call her Lisa instead of Liza. Ironically, her last name was misspelled on the tickets when she performed years later at the Winter Garden – they spelled it with only one “n.” (Perhaps Kander and Ebb should’ve written a second song, about her surname.)

In addition to her theater work and concerts, Minnelli is well known for her film roles, including “The Sterile Cuckoo,” “Tell Me That You Love Me, Junie Moon,” “New York, New York,” “Arthur,” “Arthur 2: On the Rocks” and of course, “Cabaret,” for which she received an Academy Award.

“Yeah, I was in ‘Cabaret’ when they wrote ‘Cabaret,’” she says. “And then it changed, and they wanted to have an English girl and an American man. So then I didn’t do it. But I knew I’d do the movie. I’d just do it.” She laughs in her trademark laugh that punctuates many of her statements.

It’s the image of Minnelli in black bustier, stockings, garters, and bowler hat, all graceful limbs, big eyes and bigger lashes, which people associate most with “Cabaret.” Not only did she win an Academy Award for her portrayal of Sally Bowles, but she also received a



Liza through the decades, clockwise from the top, with Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr., Carol Burnett, Liz Taylor, and her father Vincente Minnelli.

PHOTOS AT OFFICIALLIZAMINNELLI.COM

Golden Globe and appeared on the covers of “Time” and “Newsweek” magazines during the same week.

And her 1972 TV show, “Liza with a ‘Z,’” directed and choreographed by Bob Fosse, broke new ground by being filmed before a live audience in New York’s Lyceum Theatre, using eight different cameras. Minnelli, wearing revealing costumes designed by Halston, sang and danced to songs such as “Bye Bye Blackbird,” “Son of a Preacher Man,” and of course, Kander and Ebb’s songs, including the a string of songs from “Cabaret” and “Liza With a ‘Z.’” (A fully restored, digitally remastered copy of the show, which had not been seen on television since a re-airing in 1973, was shown by Showtime last April.)

The TV show won a Peabody Award and a slew of Emmys for Best Outstanding Single Program – Variety and Popular Music, Best Performance, Best Direction and Best Choreography, Best

Music, Lyrics and Special Material, and Best Performance, for Minnelli.

Minnelli joined the rare club of those who have received a Tony Award (she has three), an Oscar, and an Emmy. (She’s also received a Grammy Legend Award.) She’s also noted for being the only Academy Award winner whose parents were both Academy Award winners as well.

Recently, she sang on a My Chemical Romance song (“Mama” on “The Black Parade” CD), was on an episode of “Law & Order: Criminal Intent” and appeared for 10 episodes on “Arrested Development” as Lucille Austero.

This Friday, March 28, Liza Minnelli performs at the Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall.

“People tell me they’re great fun,” she says of her concerts. “I have fun.”

She performs her hits, as well as some Kay Thompson songs. (Actress Thompson was her godmother, plus the author

“Well, I didn’t want to do anything my parents did. They were living in Hollywood. When you’re a kid and you’re watching a movie being made, it’s really boring. They have to do it over and over and over again. But what I liked to do was hang out in the dance rehearsal halls, where I could watch people dancing. So that’s what I wanted to be, a dancer. And then I decided I was going to become an ice skater.”

—Liza Minnelli

of the “Eliose” series of children’s books, said to be partially based on Minnelli.)

“The Kay Thompson material is wonderful, that’s brand-new. Kay did a fabulous arrangement of “Liza (All the Clouds’ll Roll Away)” at one point, and Ron Lewis, our director/choreographer, staged a great number for the boys. Wait ‘til you see the choreography for the Kay Thompson numbers. You’ll die, it’s just so funny.”

Minnelli is working on a CD of Thompson tunes, “The Godmother and the Goddaughter” and is working on a show that will be entirely devoted to Thompson.

“The other songs that I sing, I’ve always thought of them as a little movie, with their different characters,” Minnelli says. “Different characters sing the songs. For example, if I’m singing...let’s see... ‘Maybe This Time,’ that’s Sally. So you come at it from the actor’s point of view, as opposed to just singing the notes.

“Why is this woman singing ‘Maybe This Time?’ What happened to her that she’s singing those words? It doesn’t matter that nobody else knows what it is, as long as you know, so you’re specific.”

You have to believe the words to deliver the song, she says.

The struggles in her personal life should certainly provide emotional fodder to fuel her songs, including four divorces (the last one dragged through the tabloids), struggles with addictions, three knee surgeries, two hip surgeries and a battle with viral encephalitis. Minnelli is no stranger to difficulty and perseverance. Perhaps that’s why she has such a loyal gay following. But when asked her thoughts on why she’s adored by so many gay fans, she just laughs and says, “I think they have good taste. I don’t know. I haven’t a clue. I’m just grateful.”

She’s also not sure what drives her, simply saying, “I have no idea. I just know that I enjoy [performing.]”

Before a show, she has a feeling of anticipation, she says.

“I think I know what a racehorse must feel like, going into the gate,” she says. “That’s the feeling I get. I get excited. I don’t get scared. I just get excited. I say to myself, ‘OK, now, concentrate. Remember what you’re supposed to do. What did Ron tell you? You got a note on that last night, so don’t do that.’ And just thinking, ‘These people have paid good money to come in and get some relief for an hour and a half, so give it to them.’”

“I always strive for excellence, and that’s what I like to see in any performance that I go to. I think that if you hit a certain level of excellence in your work, that you don’t have to worry, as long as you keep up that excellence.” ■