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## Television Soundtrack Recording – Columbia Records/Speakers Corner

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**Liza With A "Z" – Original  
Television Soundtrack  
Recording – Columbia  
Records KC 31762  
(1972)/Speakers Corner (2015) 180-gram  
stereo vinyl, 48:22 \*\*\*\*:**



(Starring Liza Minelli; Bob Fosse – director, choreography; Fred Ebb – writer, original musical material; John Kander – original musical material; Phil Ramone – engineer; Arthur Kendy – engineer; Marvin Hamlisch – musical coordinator)

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As the 1960's unfolded, the classic mainstream "big shows" were disappearing from film, Broadway and concert forums. There were a few notable exceptions, including Barbra Streisand (*My Name Is Barbra*), Frank Sinatra (*A Man And His Music*, *Francis Albert Sinatra Does His Thing*) and Julie Andrews/Carol Burnett (*Julie And Carol At Carnegie Hall*). Often, television specials were vehicles for comebacks of veteran performers. This trend continued into the 1970's. But the Broadway musical was changing dramatically, reflecting the anti-hero contexts of film. *Hair* introduced hippie culture to the world.

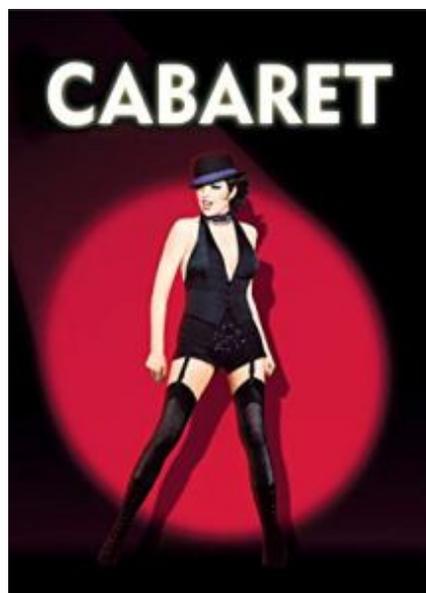
In 1966, *Cabaret* electrified the predictable musical play orthodoxy. It focused on early 1930's Germany, just prior to the advent of Nazism. This unrelenting social commentary was adapted to a musical. Like *West Side Story* and *Carousel*, audiences reacted favorably to the controversial subject matter. In a fortuitous pairing, actress/singer Liza Minelli and director Bob Fosse took *Cabaret* to another level in the film version. Minelli's ability to intermingle old school musical theatrics with topical edginess earned her an *Oscar*, and a superstar was born. Minelli revived the classic, lavish stage act. In 1972, she and Fosse reunited for the television special *Liza With A "Z"*. With an all-star crew (Marvin Hamlisch, Fred Ebb, John Kander and Halston), the concert was filmed at the Lyceum Theatre in New York. *Liza With A "Z"* was broadcast twice in 1972, and won 4 *Emmys*. It would be 3 decades until this concert re-emerged on DVD.

Speakers Corner has released a re-mastered vinyl of the soundtrack to *Liza With A "Z"*. Although some aspects of the performance are mitigated by the absence of video, Minelli's talent is on full display. As the announcer intones..."Ladies and gentleman...Liza Minelli", the orchestra swells and Minelli delivers on the inspirational Kander Ebb (*Cabaret* songwriters) crowd-pleaser, "Yes". Her slightly trembling vibrato (hard not to make a comparison to her mother) and exuberant "belt it



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out" style works for her. Next up is "God Bless The Child". A Billie Holiday classic, Liza injects some of the restrained eloquence of Holiday's version. There are accents on clarinet and a strong piano, but eventually there is a slight over-the-top shift (a la Blood Sweat & Tears). With a buoyant nervous giggle, she engages in repartee about her name which leads into a clever, music hall anecdotal rendering (kudos to Kander & Ebb again) of the show's title song. The accelerated phrasing has the bravado of Streisand's take on "The Minute Waltz".

The material selection in most cases is strong. "It Was A Good Time" (from the film *Ryan's Daughter*) is suited toward vocal dramatics. The lyrics of divorce are framed by an expansive musical arrangement (brass, woodwinds, percussion) and interludes with haunting references to nursery rhymes. Of course, there is a big finish (with some dancing no doubt). On the other hand, the weird Joe Tex soul tune ("I Gotcha") misses the mark. It may appeal to the audience, but loses a lot in the audio-only translation. "Ring Them Bells" returns to her strength, with a comical narrative voiced by Minelli in New York accent. Her phrasing is intuitive. Side 2 opens with the immortal Dusty Springfield hit, "Son Of A Preacher Man". Liza does a credible job, but the exit from the slow groove seems inauthentic. "Bye Bye Blackbird" has a cool finger-snapping structure, but throws in a Las Vegas rock break. The band is good, but the Sinatra-esque flourishes are tedious.

Minelli returns to form on the adapted Charles Aznavour soliloquy "You've Let Yourself Go". The humor and pathos are expressed with melancholy strings and some "talking" vocals. On "My Mammy", the chanteuse assumes her rightful status as a "trooper" in the tradition of Al Jolson (who made this a hit), Ethel Merman, Sophie Tucker, Barbra Streisand and yes, Judy Garland! Schmaltz is the essence of this tune, and it always works. The show concludes with a 10 minute medley from *Cabaret*. It is the perfect combination of an unforgettable performer and score. "Wilkommen" has that early Berlin nightclub swagger with a unique framing of reeds, violin and banjo. The beautiful melody "Married" has a memorable 3/4 time signature and Minelli's interpretive skills are prominent. On "Money Money" the frenetic, edgy underground saloon imagery is jolting. The vibe has a tender, jazzy shift on the aspirational "Maybe This Time". There is no better way to end this

special evening than with the rag-time swing of the theme from "Cabaret".

Even with some dubious song choices, *Liza With A "Z"* is an excellent concert. The orchestra is first-rate and Minelli rises to the occasion. The sound mix (Arthur Kendy, Phil Ramone) is excellent, with the vocals always in the center.

### TrackList:

Side 1: Yes; God Bless The Child; Lisa With A "Z"; It Was A Good Time; I Gotcha; Ring Them Bells

Side 2: Son Of A Preacher Man; Bye Bye Blackbird; You've Let Yourself Go; My Mammy; Cabaret Medley: Willkommen; Married; Money, Money; Maybe This Time; Cabaret; Bows

—Robbie Gerson




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