

British Theatre Guide

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Liza Liza Liza

Richard Harris

Bill Kenwright

Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford

25–29 March 2014

Liza Minelli is such an icon, so well-known and loved by her audiences, that it takes a brave soul to take on the role of portraying her life. Richard Harris has lessened (or maybe compounded) the problem by providing three actresses showing Liza at different stages of her life.

Felicity Duncan takes command of the stage as the present-day Liza, older but probably no wiser so far as financial or romantic matters are concerned. Walking with a stick, a little extra weight and now carrying metal parts in her body, (i.e. a replacement hip and knee joint) she is still as glamorous as ever and with a personality to match. Duncan is also the nearest in appearance to the Liza we know and she confides in the audience with her reminiscences of remembered events.

On stage with her, Laura Jane Cook as the young impressionable Liza is totally overshadowed by her volatile mother (Judy Garland) who, it seems, gives her an emotional roller-coaster ride with her changes of mood, from the heights of well-being to the depths of despair.

Recent graduate Cook gambles around like an enthusiastic young puppy practicing her ballet exercises. She is definitely not proficient in this discipline, although later she proves more than capable in a more modern dance style. Her singing voice is great and blends beautifully with that of Duncan.

Also on stage throughout is Sabrina Carter as Liza number 2, for a great deal of act 1 sitting with her back to the audience applying make-up as well as supplying the voice of Judy either with snippets of song and helpful (or hurtful) comments to her daughter.

What a revelation when she turns around as a Liza now growing in confidence and ready for a performance in *Cabaret*. This lady could carry a cabaret performance alone as she not only belts out a song, but in true 'Judy' style sings with tremendous depth of feeling.

It was a shame that the sound system had a few intermittent faults in act 1 and dropped the volume here and there, but this was all fixed after the interval and didn't really spoil the enjoyment.

The set is simple, yet at the same time suggesting opulence, and a grand piano is present on stage with (presumably) Neil MacDonald providing music and the occasional comment. The songs are favourites from Judy's enormous repertoire, beautifully performed and best with all three singing in unison. There is a lot of humour in the show too, mostly observations from the older Liza, now less competitive and with nothing more to prove, able to laugh at herself.

There is nothing revelatory here, Minnelli's life is so well known having been documented at every stage of her progress, the initial interest being comparing her with her famous mother. Phil Wilmott

keeps the show moving happily along and, while not earth-shattering, it turns into a very enjoyable production. We wouldn't, though, have minded a little more of the music.

Reviewer: [Sheila Connor](#)