

## Interview: Brown Paper Box Co. Presents 'Mary'z with a Z' on May 5 & 6, 2016

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 5, 2016 - 1:43pm

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CHICAGO – In 1972, an historic television special took place, featuring the top talents at the time at the top of their game. “Liza with a ‘Z’” featured Liza Minnelli, fresh from her Academy Award winning performance in the film “Cabaret.” The Brown Paper Box Co. will present “Mary’z with a Z,” at Mary’s Attic on May 5th and 6th, 2016, and will perform the songs from this TV special, in order and in (appropriately) cabaret style, with contributions from their ensemble and some of the biggest song talents in storefront theater in Chicago.

Liza Minnelli had some of the greatest 1972 talent for her TV special, including “Cabaret” director Bob Fosse helming the TV show and inventing the choreography, with songs by John Kander and Fred Ebb (the “Cabaret” composer team), and orchestration by the late icon Marvin Hamlisch. It was a dream team before the word was invented, with both original songs and a stunning Liza medley from “Cabaret.”



'Mary'z with a Z,' Presented by the Brown Paper Box Co.

Photo credit: Brown Paper Box Co.

The coordinator of this event is the Executive Director of the Brown Paper Box Co., M. William Panek (and Justin Harner). William is a graduate in theater direction from the University of Illinois, and formed the theater company with his fellow U of I alumni in 2009. Brown Paper Box Co. have become known in Chicago storefront theater circles for their brilliant and daring musicals, and the “Mary’z with a Z” is a fundraiser for their ensemble. Mary’s Attic is the performance space above Mary’s Hamburgers in the Andersonville neighborhood of Chicago. For more information and to purchase tickets, [click here](#). [17]

HollywoodChicago.com interviewed William Panek by phone, in anticipation of this special two-night event, not to be missed by any fan of Liza, Fosse, Kander, Ebb, Hamlisch and the performance art itself.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What do you think people know, and more importantly don't know, about the historic 'Liza with a Z' 1972 television special, that makes it prime for the cabaret treatment?

**M. William Panek:** What people know is Liza herself, and the vibrant performer she was back in 1972, when her and all those coordinators of the special – Bob Fosse, Fred Ebb and John Kander – were insane with the popularity of the film 'Cabaret.' But because this was a television event, and among a lot of those types of specials they did back then, it became kind of lost.

Unless you know someone who has seen it, or have seen the 2005 Showtime Channel DVD release, the special kind of came and went. To say we're reinventing it sounds lofty, but we are reinventing the songs and ideas of a piece of performance that to me, is pure perfection.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** The TV special itself was an historic coming together of talents at the top of their game in 1972. Besides Liza, which of the talents is your favorite and why?

**Panek:** In our cabaret, we're not doing full dance numbers. We've actually talked about Marvin Hamlisch [the music coordinator] a lot, and how difficult it was for us at times to piece together his musical numbers, because he was a genius arranger. It was up to our musical directors and individual performers to 're-orchestrate' Marvin themselves – he totally had a hand in making the original television special so special.



Liza Minnelli, in 'Liza with a Z' in 1972

Photo credit: Showtime Entertainment Television

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Liza proved to be a massive a talent as her mother Judy Garland. What do you think drove her, to arguably go beyond what her mother did?

**Panek:** My initial reaction is that Liza learned a little something, by observing what would happen if she went down a certain path. I've been watching a lot of old videos of Liza and Judy together, and when Judy says 'dance,' Liza starts dancing. [laughs] There was joy, and it's made more poignant by the fact that they didn't have much time together. I think that was part of it for Liza.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Each of the iconic song presentations are equally fabulous, but is there something that came out of this treatment that is not to be missed?

**Panek:** We do the songs in order, and every song tops the next one. I'm barely shilling right now [laughs], I can't believe what these people achieved, with not much of a guidance. When I assigned the various performers their songs, I asked them to do it their way. Some are doing it standard, some are bringing wild new orchestrations. It's shockingly phenomenal.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Finally, if you were to call Liza Minnelli right after this interview, how would you pitch this show to her, to convince her to come see it?

**Panek:** I would just say that to know what you did 44 years ago is sheer perfection. We are reinventing it through the eyes of the top people in Chicago storefront theater, which is a little sappy and a little weird, but super focused and super dedicated. Liza, please come.

*Brown Paper Box Co. presents "Mary's with a Z" for two nights only, May 5th and 6th, 2016, 7:30pm, at Mary's Attic, 5400 Clark Street in Chicago. Featuring the ensemble members of Brown Paper Box Co., ensemble alumni and "fresh faces." Coordinated by M. William Panek and Justin Harner.*



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