

Judy's Daughter Reminds Critics of Mama's Success

By DOC QUIGG
United Press International
 New York — The slim girl with the wide-apart eyes came stumping into the shabby old theater, the heavy cast on her left foot thumping on the bare boards, and said "Hi!"

plipped into a chair, and began rehearsing a bit which requires her to unwind the dark brown hair from its heavy pile atop her head and let it tumble.

Vivacious is an overworked word, but on Liza Minelli it fits. Not even a fracture of the foot can dull a sort of built-in sprightliness she carries into a rehearsal that requires a lot of movement.

"What does your mama think about your going out to the stage?" an interviewer asked when she had a moment's pause.

"If I wasn't any good, I

know she'd take me off," she said. "She wants me to do what I'm happy and good at." Mama isn't attending any rehearsals, but she will be there opening night. Her name is Judy Garland, sometimes known as "Miss Show Business." But on this one, she wants all the publicity to go to Liza.

Liza Minelli turned 17 on March 12, and mama gave a birthday party for her friends and members of the cast of this off-Broadway revival of the "great hit musical 'Best Foot Forward' that opened on Broadway in 1941 and served

up for stardom such unknown teen-agers as June Allyson and Nancy Walker.

Someone at the party asked Miss Garland how she liked the record that Liza had just made of two songs of the show.

"I loved it, I played it all night," she replied, and then her eyes moistened up and she turned to Liza and said: "Every time I hear it, I just cry."

Three New Songs
 Hugh Martin, who wrote the music for the original, has provided three new songs for the revival — and he put some

added touches on a couple of them for Liza (it's pronounced Lyza) after she got the role. Martin has a working knowledge of the family. He wrote, expressly for mama, such movie tunes as "The Boy Next Door," "The Trolley Song," and "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."

Liza has studied jazz dancing for years. Her singing comes naturally. This will be her debut professional appearance, except for a dancing role in summer stock year before last in a Cape Cod town nobody ever heard of, Hyannis Port.

About three months ago, she was walking down a Manhattan street when a man from the William Morris agency stopped her and said: "Say, aren't you Liza Minelli? How'd you like to try out for a revival of . . . Three days later, she was auditioning."

"She sang two songs for us," said Producer Arthur Whitelaw, "and she was brilliant. She sounds like her mother. It's amazing, a cry in the voice, the hesitations, mannerisms. But in her own way. You should have seen Hugh Martin's face. He was just goggle-eyed."

The dancing in "Best Foot Forward" is strenuously athletic. On March 9, Liza made a pilot error from mid-air during rehearsal and cracked a bone in a one-point landing. The opening night was set back a week to April 2.

"We think she'll have the cast off and be ready to dance by then," said Director Danny Daniels, who was in the original cast.

The theater, off-Broadway's Stage 73, has only 178 seats. The stage runs the complete width of the room, and there is no orchestra pit. When the cast thunders into "Buckle

Down, Winssock!" you feel you're right there among those prep school kids.

Today's rehearsal was special. It was the first rough run-through of the two acts, and the audience was composed of hardened specialists, the cast of Irving Berlin's Broadway musical "Mr. President." A member of that cast, John Cecil Holm, wrote the book for the original and, for the revival, combined two roles for Liza so that she is both a singer-dancer and the comedienne character created by Nancy Walker.

In Singing Role
 Liza went through a singing boogie-woogie role as part of a trio, to encore applause, and later got smash applause when she wiggled through "Just a Little Joint With a Juke Box." She had to retire to the sidelines and watch her understudies do her hectic dance numbers.

But sitting there, she was alive and acting. Five toes peeked out of the cutaway front of her foot cast, tapping time against the cold wood floor. There was the infectious smile, so reminiscent. And she silently mouthed the words of all the songs of the other characters as they performed.

In the second act, she had a spot alone on the stage, with a newly written sad ballad. She stood there, a tall girl in black slacks and figured blouse, plaster-cast foot thrust incongruously forward as if she had placed it on a step. Wistfully twisting a locket in her hands:

Tunes are for humming. Guitars are for strumming. Dreams are coming true . . .

Mama Recalled
 And there were some in the audience whose minds went clear back over the rainbow to another girl by a dusty Kansas road in a motion picture, singing with the same catch in the throat. She got a solid ovation.

Mama would have been proud.

There's a rainbow round the shoulders of Liza Minelli. Perhaps resting on her shoulders like a misty, but real and heavy, burden. It is hers to bear, and she is 17, and she bears it lightly.

After the run-through, she talked a little. Said she had gone to high school in Scarsdale for a while, had studied French history for a year in the Sorbonne university in Paris, was living with her mother here, like to read good novels, and if she had any hobby it was dancing.

She said she just started thinking seriously about the stage two years ago, is now attending acting school. Does she have a particular goal?

"Yes," she said, with a solemn face. "What I want to be is an artistically successful human being." And then, bright and twinkly: "How did you like the show?"

It was very good, should be a hit. You were good. Good luck.

"Thanks," she said, and stumped off with her boy friend to a restaurant for an ice cream soda.

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OFF-BROADWAY SHOW — Liza Minelli assumes several personalities with quick hair changes and ends up typical teenager. She will have her mother, Judy Garland, in the audience when she opens in off-Broadway revival of "Best Foot Forward." (UPI)

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