



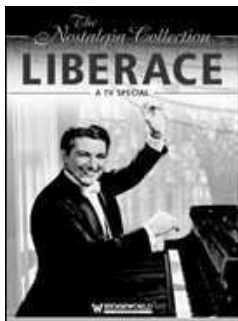
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Case Number 15258: Small Claims Court



Liberace: A TV Special

MVD Visual // 1955 // 88 Minutes // Not Rated

Reviewed by Appellate Judge Tom Becker // December 17th, 2008

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Appellate Judge Tom Becker is underwhelmed by Liberace's adventures in Wienerworld.

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Scales of Justice

Judgment: 35

Perp Profile

Studio: [MVD Visual](#)

Video Formats:

- Full Frame

Audio Formats:

- Dolby Digital 2.0 Mono (English)

Subtitles:

- None

Running Time: 88 Minutes

Release Year: 1955

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Genres:

- [Bad Movies](#)
- [Classic Film and Television](#)
- [Concerts and Musicals](#)
- [Performance](#)
- [TV Series and Movies](#)

Distinguishing Marks

- New Orleans Special

Accomplices

- [IMDb](#)
- [Liberace Museum and Foundation](#)
- [Wienerworld site](#)



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The Charge

It's been wonderful being with all of you again!

The Case

Let's start with the misleading title. This is not **Liberace: A TV Special**. It's a set of episodes from Liberace's old (1950s) TV series. They are not part of a special, and they are not Very Special episodes. There's no color, no showmanship, no Dancing Waters, no Charo, or any other old-school TV personality—as a matter-of-fact, there's no personality here at all.

The Liberace Show, which aired from 1952 to 1955, was a bland affair. It featured the big L sitting at the piano and playing a bunch of songs, generally with some kind of common theme ("Lady's Night," for instance). Sometimes an orchestra, a couple of dancers, or a soloist would join him. Now and again, his mother would drop by. Liberace didn't really joke around or banter; he'd just introduce the songs, chat a bit, and play. Oh, and he sings, too. Not his strong suit, singing, not his strong suit at all.

Somehow, this room-temperature cheese was a recipe for success, and it provided the foundation for Liberace's later, mind-boggling popularity. His fans—matronly, yet rabid—found him to be the nice boy next door, with his dimply smile, low-key charm, and ever-present mother. He was exactly the kind of boy they wished their daughters would bring home. The daughters, unfortunately, were into more square-jawed and manly guys, like Rock Hudson or George Nader, or teen idols like Sal Mineo, but still, a mother could dream.

And, all those mothers—and ladies with schoolgirls crushes—could invite Liberace into their homes for half an hour each week, which they did. And all that's very interesting. The problem is that there's no reason to watch the show now.

However well Liberace and his program were regarded more than half a century ago, watching these shows today is deadly dull. I kept expecting Liberace to do something Liberace-like—flash a bejeweled hand, make a fey-but-pointed quip, grope his chauffeur, walk on water, anything. Alas, it was not to be. Everything was done on a small scale that some might call "intimate," but I call "cheap." Even the candelabrum is a pitiful-looking thing. This Liberace makes Lawrence Welk seem

like a flamboyant showman; clearly, the colorful Vegas staple was a few years down the road.

There are three episodes here that run about 26 minutes each: "Lady's Night," "Musical Shopping Tour," and "The Orchestra Steps Out." Also listed as a "bonus" is "New Orleans Special," which is not a special at all but merely 10 minutes of a show that used the Big Easy as its theme. This one features a boys' choir singing "Ave Maria" and Liberace talking about the people of Louisiana as though they were some sort of exotic bugs.

If you're thinking that, dull as it is, this might be a nice way to revisit those happy days when Ike and Mamie were in the White House, think again. This thing looks horrid. This DVD comes from a UK company called Wienerworld and is being distributed through MVD in the U.S. I'm wondering if Wienerworld didn't pull these shows out of public domain; if not, they must have been licensed for next to nothing. The transfers look like multi-generation dubs from an old VHS, there are streaks, jumps, and all sorts of damage. The sound is creaky and cracky. There was obviously nothing at all done to improve the quality. It's hard to see Liberace's physical charms, the smiles and dimples, for instance, since the rotten transfer makes his face is practically devoid of features; if anything, he looks like a non-threatening vampire.

A great thing about home video is that it enables us to revisit oft-forgotten moments in our cultural history. As we move forward toward an "on-demand" world—and I believe that within the next decade, home video devices as we know them will be all but obsolete, replaced with digital downloading and all things being available "on demand"—being able to access a few minutes of *The Liberace Show* will one day be an inoffensive luxury. Having 90 badly rendered minutes of it on a disc just seems like a waste.

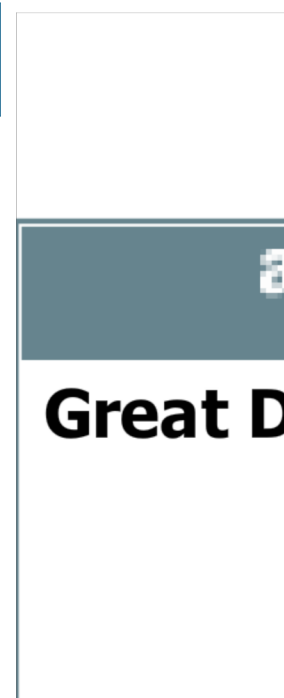
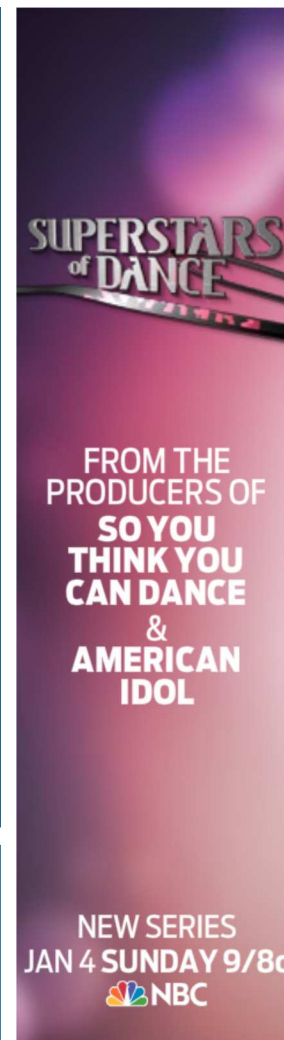
Guilty.

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