

LIZA 'BELTS' ONE OUT



THROTTLED: Liza Minnelli and ex-driver M'hammed Soumayah in happier times. He now claims the stormy songstress beat him when she drank. Lawrence Schwartz/atl

Singer battered me, too: chauffeur's lawsuit

By DAREH GREGORIAN

Liza Minnelli was beating another man on the side while she was married to David Gest, a sensational new lawsuit charges.

M'hammed Soumayah, Minnelli's former longtime chauffeur, confidant and companion, has quietly filed suit against the Oscar winner, claiming she repeatedly attacked him in alcohol-fueled rampages, a knowledgeable source told *The Post*. The suit was filed under seal earlier this week.

seeks "money damages arising from personal injuries." The source said some of those injuries were the result of attacks at the hands of the 58-year-old Minnelli.

Soumayah isn't the first to claim Minnelli is a bullying boozehound — Gest filed a \$10 million assault suit against his estranged wife last year, which claimed she became violent and gained almost superhuman strength when she drank.

"Liza should change professions — drop acting and go into boxing," the source quipped. "This is deep truth."

ble for Liza. It completely vindicates David Gest" by backing up his contention that she's a manbeater, the source said.

Soumayah's lawyer, Harvey Mars, declined to comment on the suit, except to say it was "substantial." He would not confirm or deny the assault allegations. He said the action was filed under seal "because of a confidentiality agreement" his client had when he was working for Minnelli until she fired him in August.

Minnelli lawyer Dorothy Webber said she had not

seen the suit and could not comment.

Soumayah, 56, started driving for the songstress in 1994, and quickly became known as her right-hand man. Their relationship suffered, however, when Minnelli, who has a history of drug and alcohol problems, started drinking again after marrying Gest, the source said.

Gest's lawsuit recounts one incident in 2002 where Minnelli — frustrated that Gest wouldn't let her order up booze from hotel room service — went out on a

bender with Soumayah.

"Hours later, [she] returned to the hotel extremely intoxicated, upset, agitated, uncontrollable and angry" and attacked Gest, the suit says.

The source said, "The difference between Liza's relationship with M'hammed and David is that David would not let her drink and would put her in bed even when she was beating him."

"M'hammed couldn't take her physical abuse, which he received more than his fair share of," the source said. Mars said Gest, 51, has

subpoenaed Soumayah to be deposed as a witness in his assault case, and that his client "will comply with the subpoena."

While both Gest's assault and divorce actions are still pending, a source close to the producer said he might not be through with Liza-related lawsuits. The source said he's planning to file a novel suit within the next two weeks against a Pennsylvania-based rehab center that treated Minnelli. "The suit will charge they let her out too early," the source said.