



Caffe Lena

Jocelyn Arem

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In 1960, burgeoning actress and defiant dreamer Lena Spencer opened a small, grassroots coffeehouse in the quaint upstate New York town of Saratoga Springs. Within her then-husband's plan to start the Caffè as a means for the couple to artistically flourish while "making enough money to retire in Europe" lay the seed of a more impactful cultural contribution that would change music history forever. It was a time in America when a coffeehouse could be something more—a focal point for a different sort of people, radical new ideas, and notably, emerging artists. Caffè Lena's humble stage regularly welcomed musicians such as a young Bob Dylan in 1961, the singer/activist Bernice Johnson Reagon in 1962, and a pre-"American Pie" Don McLean in 1965. Quickly, Caffè Lena took its place among the nation's foremost incubators of an American folk movement that inspired a generation of musicians, artists, and thinkers and a country in need of a new vision of equality, freedom, and understanding. Fortunately for posterity, camera shutters were often snapping in time to the music, and so an intimate visual record of Caffè Lena's early years exists. Now, thanks to years of dedicated digging by the Caffè Lena History Project—to unearth Lena's secret memoirs, collaborating with photographers to identify and rescue mysterious negatives, and collecting stories from the original artists to highlight these materials—the time has come to share this treasure trove of authentic and rare Americana with the world. Caffè Lena: Inside America's Legendary Folk Music Coffeehouse brings more than 200 never before seen, evocative images and stories to the public. Early 1960s photographs of Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger and modern-day images of Rufus Wainwright and Patty Larkin blend with rare memorabilia and an oral history derived from more than 100 original interviews of artists who have graced Caffè Lena's stage over the decades, including Ani DiFranco, Utah Phillips, Dave Van Ronk, Spalding Gray, and other luminaries of the folk, blues, jazz, and theater worlds. This exclusive time capsule chronicling the heyday of Caffè Lena—now the country's oldest continuously operational folk music coffeehouse—provides an insightful look at the many artists whose poetic lyrics cast a mesmerizing spell over a generation, and who remain beloved today. Alongside the release of Caffè Lena: Inside America's Legendary Folk Music Coffeehouse, San Francisco's Tompkins Square label will release the 3-CD box set, 'Live at Caffè Lena: Music From America's Legendary Coffeehouse, 1967-2013' on September 24, 2013. "Caffè Lena holds an important place in the folk and traditional music communities. For me it was the gateway to so many things I hold dear about music." -Scott Goldman, The GRAMMY Foundation "The story of Caffè Lena is the secret history of the folk-music scene. Lena was a pioneering woman in a man's world and her story needs to be told." -Holly George-Warren, The Road to Woodstock "Lena Spencer was a rare person with a shining spirit who created a small world of her own. The magic of her Caffè cannot be analyzed, computerized, or explained." -David Amram, Musician

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