What is Caffè Lena?

Caffè Lena, located in Saratoga Springs, New York, is America’s oldest surviving folk music coffeehouse, started by Lena Spencer in 1960. It nurtured the early careers of America’s greatest folk musicians in the folk revival and continues to do so every week on the very same stage today!

Who Graced the Stage at Caffè Lena Then and Now?

Bob Dylan, Arlo Guthrie, Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, Rufus Wainright, Ani DiFranco, Pete Seeger, Mississippi John Hurt, Emmylou Harris, Tim Robbins, Kate McGarrigle, Odetta, Don McLean, Mike Seeger, Spalding Gray, Utah Phillips, Jean Ritchie, Tom Paxton, G.Love, Greg Brown, Lucy Kaplansky, Christine Lavin, Guy Davis, Sarah Lee Guthrie, Erin McKeown, Chris Smither, Catie Curtis, Sloan Wainwright, Geoff Muldaur, Chris Brubeck, Janis Ian, Michelle Shocked, Peter Mulvey, Anais Mitchell and many more...

The oldest continuously running coffeehouse in the country, Caffe Lena endures as a time capsule and a natural documentary subject

- The New York Times
The Caffè Lena History Project has unearthed 6,000 photos, 700 hours of recordings, 45 boxes of memorabilia and 100 interviews documenting the untold story of America’s oldest continuously running folk music coffeehouse – Help us make these materials available to the public to honor Lena Spencer’s life and legacy. We are planning:

(1) Coffeetable Book (powerHouse Books)
Featuring selections from 100 firsthand interviews with Caffè Lena artists and community members; 225 never-before-seen photographs from the collection of Joe Alper (1925-1968), recognized by Martin Scorsese, the Library of Congress, and the Alan Lomax archives.

(2) CD Box Set (Tompkins Square Records)
Featuring selections from 700 hours of unreleased live concert material recorded at Caffè Lena between 1967-today, digitized by the GRAMMY Award-winning Magic Shop Studio. Tapes reveal extraordinary audio quality; only a select few have ever been heard.

(3) Exhibition
(Tang Teaching Museum Jun-Oct 2013)
(powerHouse Arena, NY Nov 2013)
Featuring selections from 6,000 photographs and Caffè Lena archival memorabilia drawn from the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

(4) Website (The Splinter Group)
An online resource for students, scholars, and fans of folk music: www.caffelenahistory.org.