

INSIDE CAFFÈ LENA

Music, Learning & Connection





JEFFREY GAINES

MISSION & VISION

TO PROVIDE MUSIC
CONNECTION & LEARNING
FROM A LEGENDARY VENUE.



Caffè Lena envisions a vibrant community where music, poetry, and storytelling are widely practiced by amateurs and professionals alike. We foster creative fellowship, preserve American folk music culture, and encourage lifelong engagement in the arts. We inspire and connect people of all ages and backgrounds, ensuring that the arts remain a vital part of our collective experience, and contribute to civic and personal health.



FOLK CLUB KIDS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

For some of you, these pages will read like a yearbook filled with familiar faces, events you attended, names you know. Others will be surprised and, I hope, delighted to discover that our community embraces young and old, rich and poor, neighbors here in Saratoga, and streamers on the other side of the world, all listening, learning and connecting through Lena's music.

Our staff members are proud to share their recent work with you in this Annual Report. They'll tell you about the excitement of building a concert schedule, of developing the next generation of musicians, of bringing songs to those who need them most, and of crunching the numbers to quantify our impact.

The Caffè's mission is fueled by goodwill earned over more than six decades. There is no shortcut to developing the extraordinary spirit of Caffè Lena. It can only be built one song, one warm greeting, one perfect seat at a time. What was established here at 47 Phila on May 21, 1960, continues through us--the audience, artists, volunteers, donors and staff--and together we're making it stronger for the future.

Thanks for sharing the joy and the journey with us.

Sarah Craig
Executive Director

SARAH INTERVIEWING JANIS IAN



CAPITAL REGION PRESENTER OF THE YEAR 2023-2025

FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

As I step into the role of Board President at Caffè Lena, I do so with humility and a clear sense of responsibility for what this place has been, and what it must continue to be. Caffè Lena is more than a music venue. It is a listening room, a classroom, and a gathering place at the heart of our community. This mission lights up our stage every night.

It also happens beyond the stage. In schools. In public spaces. Through partnerships that extend our reach to people who may never walk through our doors—but who are no less part of what we do.

Some of that work generates revenue. Much of it doesn't.

All of it matters.

We offer something increasingly rare: a place to gather, to listen, and to connect—without distraction or pretense. Like the building itself, a strong financial foundation matters. It supports everything we do now and in the future.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Caffè Lena runs on belief: sustained by donors, volunteers, and our extraordinary staff who bring this place to life every day. We are fortunate to inherit a legacy built with care and conviction over decades.

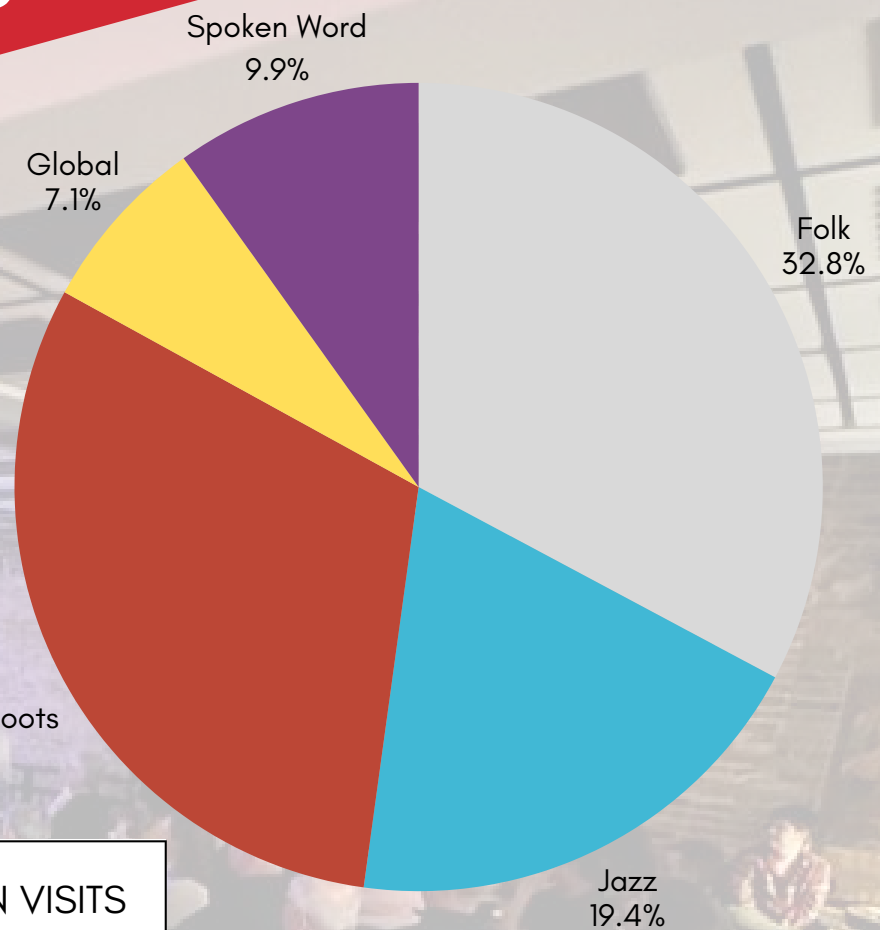
Our responsibility is not simply to preserve it, but to put it to work—to extend its reach, deepen its impact, and ensure it endures.

And grows.

***Eric Gordon
President
Caffè Lena Board of Directors***



2025 THE SHOWS



28K IN-PERSON VISITS

350K ONLINE VIEWERS

2K CHILDREN SERVED

4,500 1st TIME ATTENDEES

1.5K PARTICIPATE IN
OPEN MICS & JAMS

2K REACHED THROUGH
CAFFE LENA ON THE ROAD

244 HEADLINE SHOWS
202 OPEN MICS & JAMS
60 FREE KIDS' SHOWS

THE AUDIENCE

Picking the Right Artists for Lena's Historic Stage

How Hannah Stirzaker finds music you'll love.

Howdy folks! As Booking Manager, it's my job to make sure we have great music on our stage every week. Thanks to Caffè Lena's reputation as a premier acoustic listening room, my inbox is always full of inquiries from artists wanting to play here for the first time. When you add all the artists who want to return, or artists I have on my own wish list, there's no shortage of talented musicians wanting to play here!

When deciding whether it's Yes or No, I ask four questions:

- Is this artist making quality music?
- Are they in the right place in their career?
- Is this music our audience will be interested in?
- Does it contribute to a balanced schedule?

If they tick boxes 1, 2, and 3, then the booking puzzle begins. We book folk, bluegrass, global, blues, jazz . . . I make sure that we fill our on-going series like Folk Heritage, Peak Jazz, and Nordly's Global Voices, and fill in each month with artists who will satisfy our increasingly diverse audience.

While I spend a good deal of time reviewing unsolicited submissions, the flip side is reaching out to artists who I think would be a good fit. I attend conferences like Folk Alliance International, keep an eye on festival lineups, monitor social media, and scour fan and industry publications. Sometimes discovery happens organically through the folk artists I listen to, many of whom I first discovered at the Caffè. I also value audience recommendations!

Caffè Lena has a long legacy of presenting top-level talent. It's a huge privilege to play a part in seeing that continue.

HANNAH STIRZAKER, BOOKING MANAGER





Loving Music by Making Music together.

How Caffè Lena's School of Music fosters growth & connection.

Every day, people walk through our doors at different points in their musical lives—some picking up an instrument for the very first time, others returning to something they have loved for years, and plenty right in the middle, looking for a way to play and connect with others. My job is to help them form a community.

You may find a group of toddlers running around with Miss Deb, singing and clapping with delight, or preschoolers enjoying a free performance by our Folk Club Kids band. Thirty seniors might be gathered for a Slow Jam, sharing their favorite tunes, or one of our youth bands, Jazz Mode or the Rolling Pebbles, could be working out a new tune with their instructor. Whether a group class, a private lesson, or a jam, the school pushes people of all generations to find harmony.

A big part of what makes our school special is the way it all overlaps. Beginners sit next to more experienced players. Elementary school students grow into teen bands, then into adult jams. Someone who starts in a slow jam might find themselves, a year later, leading a tune. The goal isn't perfection, but rather participation, growth, and connection.

Caffè Lena has always been about keeping tradition alive by passing it hand to hand. The School of Music is where that happens in real time, every single day.



MATT GRIFFIN, SCHOOL DIRECTOR



JAZZ MODE

Delivering Songs Where They're Most Needed

How Caffè Lena On the Road Bridges Arts & Social Services

If I'm up and out of the house before 10am, it most likely means I'm headed to a residency for Caffè Lena On The Road – perhaps down the Northway to Saratoga Bridges, a day program for adults with developmental disabilities. I'll be greeted by a dozen people—soon to be joined by about 50 more – and all are excited to see “the music guy” set up the stage area for another performance. Most of them have probably never heard anything like the band that's about to play.

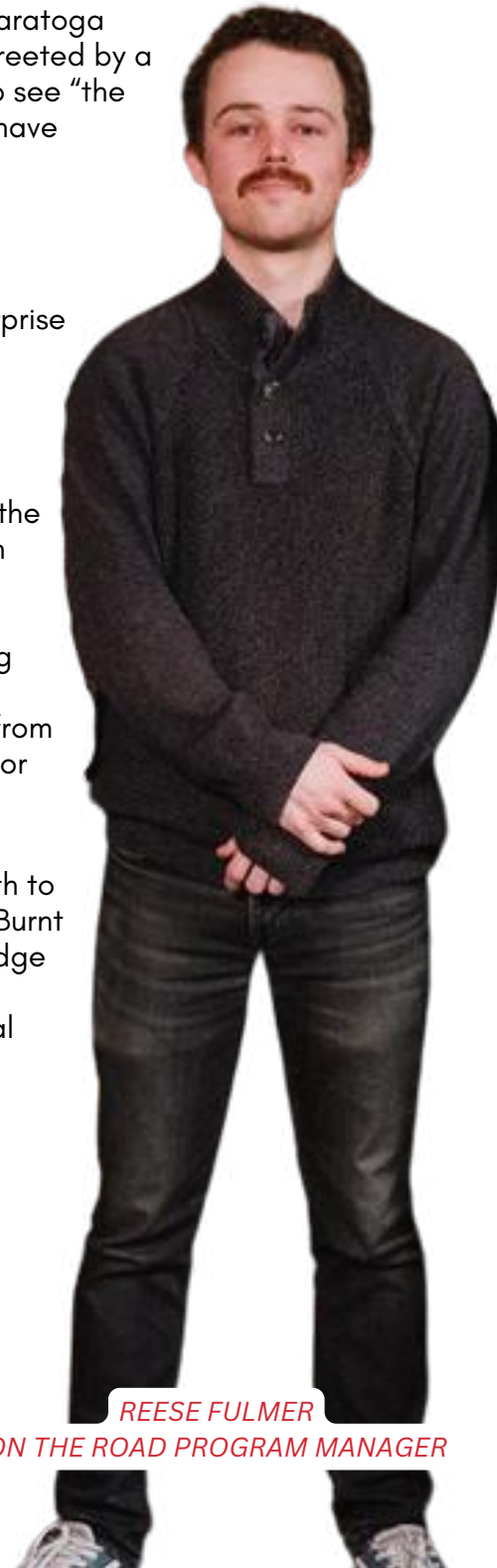
Later that morning, I might head over to the Presbyterian-UCC Church in downtown Saratoga Springs, where a team of volunteers is busy roasting chicken and plating pie for that day's soup kitchen service. Though the surprise performance will overlap with a meal, the audience will grow increasingly attentive, offering appreciative applause, and I will overhear words of gratitude as the band packs up.

In the afternoon, I might visit a local elementary school, bringing music to the students served by Franklin Community Center's Project Lift program. I can hardly get through my introduction of the band without fielding excited questions about my outfit or my mustache or whether I'm a musician, too. After the performance, when the kids have had a chance to listen and sing and dance, I'll tell them about our open mics and free Little Folks shows, assuring them that they're always welcome at Caffè Lena. Often I'll hear from the supervisors on the way out that they've never seen the children focus for that long after a full day in school.

Tomorrow I might be taking Caffè Lena On the Road south to Clifton Park, Scotia, or Voorheesville; west to Galway or Burnt Hills; north to Glens Falls or Fort Edward; east to Cambridge or Salem. Everywhere on my route I'll be welcomed by gratitude and a recognition of Caffè Lena's unconditional intention to serve people through music.



SUNSHINE FROM SARATOGA BRIDGES



REESE FULMER
ON THE ROAD PROGRAM MANAGER

ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

MUSIC FOR ALL WITH 3 GROWING ANNUAL FESTIVALS.

With no tickets and easy physical access, our festivals provide the excitement of musical discovery to all.

Sing In the Streets is Saratoga's only all-original downtown music festival.

Fiddles & Foliage shows off our School of Music folk and jazz bands.

Caffe Lena @ SPAC brings big energy to the lawn at Saratoga Performing Arts Center.



FOLK RUNS ON VOLUNTEERS



**150
Active
Volunteers**

**12,000
Hours
Worked**

VOLUNTEERS VOTED TO
DONATE \$40,000 OF TIPS FOR
FOLK CLUB KIDS
CAFFÈ LENA ON THE ROAD
SING IN THE STREETS
A NEW DISHWASHER
A FREE MLK DAY SHOW
& MORE!

**12,000
Cookies Baked
& Served**

**\$40k in
Donations
Generated
through
Tips**

Behind the Scenes in the Caffè Kitchen

Show nights at the Caffè start well before the artist walks out on stage. Behind the kitchen door, the first volunteers arrive about two hours before showtime to set up food and drink stations, bake our famous cookies, and get the coffee brewing. Shortly before you arrive for the show, our full crew of 5-7 folks is ready for action, soon to be joined by ushers (and perhaps a straggling dishwasher). You'll find me greeting volunteers as they arrive, getting everyone up to date on menu and procedural changes, filling any open roles, and providing guidance to newer recruits. When the house manager gives the okay to open doors, it's off to the races!

Even on the busiest nights, lines of communication are wide open, and a strong teamwork ethic abounds. Sometimes orders will need re-doing, the occasional dish may break, but such things are accepted and taken in stride. An extra bread pudding made by mistake might be a welcome communal snack.

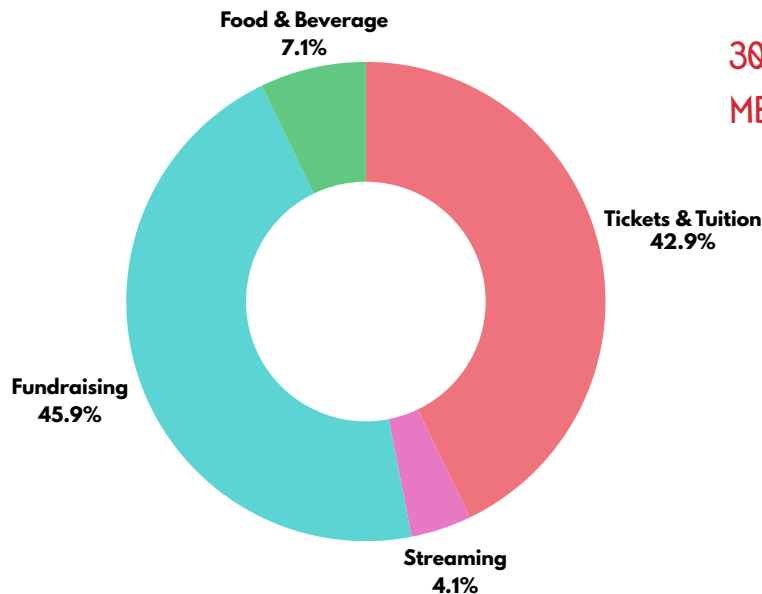
When cleanup is done, with the audience members on their way home and the artist loading their van, the volunteers sit and chat, further deepening the social connection. Vacation stories and photos of grandchildren are passed around, hiking plans are made, leftover cookies are nibbled. Sound like fun? We'd love to have you join us!

PAUL MACHABEE, VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR & KITCHEN MANAGER



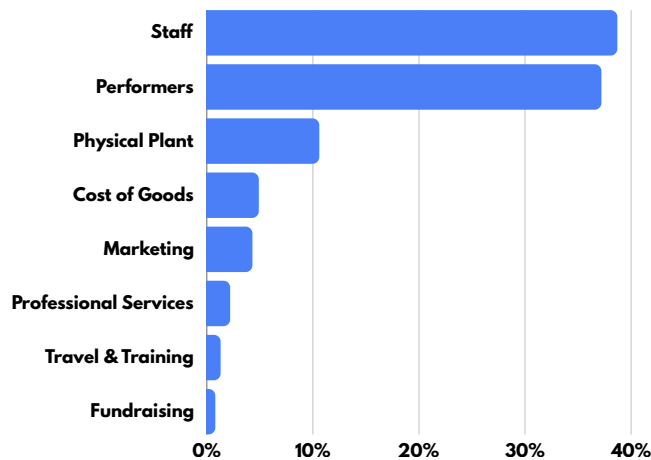
Where Our Funding Comes From

Keeping an eye on the books, with mission in mind.



300 FIRST TIME DONORS
MEDIAN DONATION = \$103

How We Put It to Work



One of the most encouraging things about the Caffè's finances is how diverse our sources of income are. Revenue comes from earned income, grants, business sponsorships, membership, and individual giving. The organization is resilient. Donor support enables us to stretch programmatically, develop the School of Music, and serve the community in ways that would not otherwise be possible.

*Mateo Vosgian, Director of Finance & Operations,
with Ophelia Vosgian, a Folk Club Kids regular.*



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1946 - 2025

REMEMBERING JOEL MOSS



We remember with love our co-worker, friend, producer, mentor, and tireless champion, Joel Moss. A 7-time Grammy Award-winning producer who worked with legends such as Johnny Cash, Tony Bennett, The Talking Heads, and Red Hot Chili Peppers, Joel spent nearly every evening for the past several years at the Caffè running livestream cameras, capturing our shows for posterity, and helping us dream big. He started our Chuck Lamb Jazz Series and our Joyful Noise Gospel series.

We are forever richer because of him.

Joel left, with JAZZ @ Caffè Lena co-producer, Chuck Lamb.