

Coffeehouses: Folk Music, Culture, and Counterculture

Since the 1950s, the history of the American folk music revival has been intertwined with the rise of coffeehouses and coffeehouse culture. Coffeehouses have been popular in America since Colonial times, but Italian-style coffeehouses arose in 20th-century Italian immigrant neighborhoods such as New York's Greenwich Village, Boston's North End, and San Francisco's North Beach. They brought with them an intimacy, informality, and slightly edgy atmosphere that allowed them to become sites of progressive political discourse. In the years following WWII, this proved an ideal match for the guitar-playing soloists, idealistic singer-songwriters, and unamplified rural- and ethnic-inspired ensembles of the early folk music revival. By the late 1950s, Italian-style coffeehouses featuring American folk and folk revival musicians had proliferated throughout the United States.

Notable performers such as Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, who began their careers on the coffeehouse circuit, and tradition bearers such as Mississippi John Hurt and Doc Watson, whose appearances at coffeehouses reignited their careers and permitted them to reach new, largely middle-class urban audiences, have been studied extensively. However, the individuals who made and continue to make folk music coffeehouses work have received far less attention.

This forum, produced by the Library of Congress's American Folklife Center (AFC), brings together coffeehouse producer Betsy Siggins from Boston's legendary Club 47, Caffè Lena History Project founder and producer Jocelyn Arem, filmmaker and documentarian Todd Kwait, and Baltimore-based performer and "open mic" organizer Rob Hinkal to explore folk music coffeehouses, both then and now. They will discuss the important role these distinctive venues played in the development, maintenance, and expansion of American folk music; how coffeehouses introduced grassroots rural performers to urban Americans; coffeehouses' contributions to the rise of singer-songwriters; and how coffeehouse "folk clubs" supported the rise of contemporary American folk music. The forum concludes with a screening of *For the Love of the Music*, Todd Kwait's recently released documentary on Club 47 and the New England folk scene.



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Produced by the American Folklife Center
Friday, April 11, 2014, 1:00 – 5:45 pm
Montpelier Room, James Madison Building
Library of Congress

Schedule

- 1:00-1:10** Welcome – Betsy Peterson, Director, AFC
1:10-1:30 Introduction to Coffeehouses – Nancy Groce, AFC
1:30-1:50 "Documenting Caffè Lena - From Buried Treasure to Books,"
Jocelyn Arem
2:00-2:20 "Club 47 and the New England Folk Music Scene," Betsy Siggins
2:30-2:50 "Open Mics and Evolution," Rob Hinkal
3:00-3:40 Discussion: Historic and Contemporary Coffeehouses
3:45-4:00 *For the Love of the Music*, Todd Kwait
4:00-5:45 Film Screening: *For the Love of the Music: The Club 47 Folk Revival*

Participants

Jocelyn Arem is a folklorist, producer, Library of Congress Parsons Award-recipient and musician. Her research has been featured in the *New York Times*, *American Airlines Magazine*, *The Association for Recorded Sound Collections Journal*, the *American Folklife Center News* and during GRAMMY Week in Los Angeles. Her eleven-year multimedia project to document Caffè Lena, America's oldest folk music coffeehouse, resulted in the Caffè Lena Archive, which has been made accessible via a book, CD box set, exhibition, website, and searchable digital database. The Caffè Lena Archive was recently acquired by the American Folklife Center.

Rob Hinkal is a Baltimore-based musician and a host of several popular "open mic" events in the Washington-Baltimore area. His band, ilyAIMY (an acronym for "I love you and I miss you"), is an award-winning rock-folk act that tours throughout the United States. He has been performing for twelve years and he has appeared at hundreds of coffeehouses, colleges, bars, theatres, bait shops, campgrounds, festivals, and resorts. Hinkal received a degree in Illustration from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. In addition to his career as a performer, he freelances as an illustrator and designer, talent buyer and promoter, and works part-time in Takoma Park, Maryland at the House of Musical Traditions.

Todd Kwait is a lawyer and businessman with a lifelong passion for film. *For the Love of the Music* is his third motion picture. Previously, he wrote, produced and directed *Chasin' Gus' Ghost*, which traces the history of jug band music and won the Best Music Documentary awards at the Bare Bones Film Festival and the New York Film & Video Festival. *Vagabonda*, his second film project, explores the career of singer-songwriter Vince Martin. Kwait's recording company, Kingwood Records, recently released *Snow Shadows: Songs of Vince Martin* by Alana Amram & The Rough Gems, and Sankofa's *The Uptown Strut*. Kwait met Rob Stegman, co-producer/co-director of *For the Love of the Music*, as a freshman at Boston University in the late 1970s.

Betsy Siggins, the founder/director of the New England Folk Music Archives (NEFMA), has been a central figure in the Cambridge, Massachusetts folk music community since she happened on the coffeehouse scene as a college freshman in 1958. She was a founding member of Club 47, where fellow Boston University students Joan Baez, Jim Kweskin, and Eric Von Schmidt helped to launch the New England folk revival. She returned to Club 47's successor, the Passim Folk Music Center, as executive director for twelve years before founding NEFMA in 2009. Among other accomplishments, she assisted folklorist Ralph Rinzler with the early Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in Washington, DC.

For the Love of the Music: The Club 47 Folk Music Revival. Co-produced and co-directed by Todd Kwait and Rob Stegman, this documentary explores the history of Club 47 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Narrated by Peter Coyote, the film features interviews with such folk music legends as Joan Baez, Taj Mahal, Judy Collins, Tom Rush, Maria Muldaur, Jim Kweskin, Jackie Washington, Jim Rooney, Peter Rowan, and many more. Previously unreleased material featuring Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Eric Von Schmidt is interspersed with newly filmed performances by Club 47 luminaries performing with today's emerging folk performers and insightful commentary by music historians Elijah Wald and Scott Alarik to contextualize the story of Club 47 within broader historical and cultural contexts. (105 minutes.)