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A Final Evening At Caffe Vivaldi (Before It Closes This Weekend)

by [Madeleine Crenshaw](#) in [Food](#) on Jun 22, 2018 4:15 pm



(Madeleine Crenshaw/Gothamist)



Caffe Vivaldi, one of the last bohemian bastions of the West Village, is [set to close](#) this weekend. During its 35 years on Jones Street, the casual cafe won the hearts of locals and celebs alike, including Oscar Isaac, [Bette Midler, and Al Pacino](#).

Despite that friendly communal atmosphere, the owners ultimately struggled to survive under their notorious vulture landlord [Steve Croman](#), who they say waged a harassment campaign against the restaurant, and eventually tripled their rent.

"The last two years I've been running the business because my father had a stroke," said Zehra Ansari, 24, the daughter of owner Ishrat Ansari. "It's been a long 35 years for my dad. Now, he's going to be focusing on writing and relaxing."

For its final week, New Yorkers and musicians have been making the pilgrimage to the small cafe for a plate of ravioli and a final evening of entertainment.

"I'll miss everything about this place," said Morton Millen, 64, a musician who strolled over from his home on St. Mark's Place to do a set at the cafe. "It's a shame that places are closing and they're doing it all over."

Millen said the timeless atmosphere of Caffe Vivaldi was one of the last places in Manhattan to foster a true community for musicians. "You met people and you connected with people, that's what it was all about," said Millen.

"This is one of the first places I started to play at," said Ace Elijah Burgess, 29, a musician and independent record label owner who lives in Bed-Stuy. "I literally met all my best friends from New York here."

Burgess, who moved to New York in 2011, said he discovered by chance that his parents also used to come to Caffe Vivaldi for a bite and a show before he was born. "When I first started going here I had no clue that my parents used to go there. My mom used to live on 10 Jones Street and when my parents met 30 years ago they used to come here," said Burgess.

Caffe Vivaldi has hardly changed since then. Ron Gluck, 79, and Barry Leshner, 78, life-long friends and native New Yorkers, said they have always enjoyed the

spot because it was reminiscent of the neighborhood's musical past. "The Village was my hangout all through the 50s and 60s," said Gluck, who performed in a trio with Leshner called [the Ned Odum Boys](#). The two had come down to the West Village to see the final performance of Denise Reis, a Brazilian singer, and guitarist.

The laid-back attitude of the owners was also something that kept the space a community.

"They leave a lot of freedom up to the artist to do whatever they want, as long as they bring people and stop making music at 11," said Stephanie Layton, 34, a jazz singer who lives in Greenpoint.

Caffe Vivaldi's final evening will be tomorrow night, Saturday, June 23rd.
