

Business of the Month: Caffè Vivaldi, 32 Jones Street

gvshp.org/blog/2016/07/15/business-of-the-month-caffe-vivaldi-32-jones-street/

Your input is needed! Today we feature our latest **Business of the Month** — help us to select the next. Tell us which independent store you love in Greenwich Village, the East Village or NoHo: [click here](#) to nominate your favorite. Want to help support small businesses? Share this post with friends.

Where can you still experience the Greenwich Village music scene in a setti



ng as creative and innovative as the sounds you hear and the sights just outside its doors? And get an Irish coffee, Italian dinner, Espresso Martini, or virgin bloody mary from a *curved* bar while you do?

At Caffè Vivaldi, 32 Jones Street — our July 2016 Business of the Month.

Located just off of Bleecker Street, you might easily pass right by this lovely spot if you did not know it was there. It is one of those old-school cafe, bar, restaurant-type places with impeccable charm. This hub of culture has been around for thirty-three years, and yes, there is a piano in the corner.

Proprietor Ishrat Ansari came to the neighborhood from Pakistan in the 1970's, opening a newsstand and variety store not far away from his current location. He sold international papers and magazines and cultivated a convivial atmosphere where people gathered to chat, and listen to the wide selection of classical music he would play. Encouraged by many who appreciated the 'neighborhoody' yet worldly vibe he created, he then opened the current establishment on Jones Street in 1983, naming it after his favorite composer.



Hannah Gill And The Hours performing at Caffè Vivaldi.

The site of a former laundromat, Caffè Vivaldi has thrived for decades with a wide variety of musicians playing at their regular open mic nights on Mondays or booked almost every day of the week. You can see their [eclectic schedule here](#).

Ishrat's love for music led to his commitment to providing a space that would encourage young talent. But you never know who might regale the intimate crowd with their talents; the likes of Marcus Mumford (of Mumford and Sons) and Oscar Isaac have performed there as well. [Here is a video](#) of their surprise performance. Al Pacino, Woody Allen, Bette Midler, Ethan Hawke, and John Cusack, among many others, have graced the intimate stage here over the years.

When local musicians perform, it's often on their way to or from Nashville or Stockholm, or some other distant locale. For non-locals, neighbors have been known to host a band on their couch, or even their floor. Caffè Vivaldi engenders that kind of warm, generous, no-frills vibe.

Of course music is not the only attraction at this intimate space. Much of the food is locally sourced, with pasta from neighborhood staple Rafettos, bread from baker Amy's Bread (just around the corner), cakes from Ferrara and Pasticceria Bruno, meat from Ottomanelli & Sons and Faicco (just down the block), and seafood from Lobster Place. Caffè Vivaldi not only supports local talent, but local businesses as well. There are lots of fun photos on their [Instagram page here](#).

The Caffè has attracted its share of luminaries over the years. Joseph Brodsky conducted his Nobel Prize interviews there. Andy Warhol had a favorite chair, which is still there. Tomorrow's stars and everyday people still mix and mingle over a cup of tea. About 8 years ago the [singer Isabella Lundgren](#) flew into New York and performed at their Open Mic that very Monday night, which at that time was hosted and staffed by Kate Sland.

Isabella wound up staying with Kate and started working at Vivaldi and also performed there regularly. She was recently honored as the [JazzCat for Jazz Musician of the year in 2015](#).

These good neighbors also have a wonderful partnership with nearby settlement house and social service provider Greenwich House, known as [Caffè Vivaldi at Renee Weiler](#). The partnership began in response to the venue's growing need for a bigger space than the current 42 seat restaurant. By partnering with Greenwich House Music School, Vivaldi is able to book artists with a larger fan base, and satisfy many more music lovers, while retaining the original spirit of the Caffè. "In Greenwich House Music School, Caffè Vivaldi has found a worthy partner in keeping live performances alive in the West Village," Ishrat Ansari has said.

In spite of a devoted following, Caffè Vivaldi, like many local business, faces enormous pressures. But in their case it's not just an overheated real estate market, but some pressures very specific to their landlord, with whom they have been engaged in many court battles over the years over rent and use of cellar space. Their landlord is Steven Croman, who [was arrested this year](#) and charged by the New York State Attorney General's office with twenty felony counts. The Attorney General [also filed a separate civil suit](#) that alleges a scheme by Mr. Croman

and his staff to harass tenants and drive them from rent-regulated apartments.

The battle has taken its toll on Ishrat the proprietor, who recently had a stroke. He is currently reducing his stress and focusing on his health and well-being, while his capable daughter Zehra manages the place. You can learn more about the plight of Caffè Vivaldi at their [petition page here](#), as well as lend your support.



Delicious Brunch on the weekends.



Hector Carosso and Zehra Ansari, long time friend and daughter of proprietor Ishrat Ansari.

But probably the best way you can support Caffè Vivaldi, and any of our struggling local independent businesses, is by patronizing it yourself, or in the case of Caffè Vivaldi, taking a friend or two to brunch or dinner, and tipping the musicians well. Or bring your guitar and sing for yourself, as you still can, for now. And hopefully for a long time to come.

By a wonderful coincidence, we are also hosting a special program there on August 2 entitled *Folk City: New York and the Folk Music Revival*. [RSVP here](#). Here's a description:

In the 1950s and 1960s, folk music blossomed in New York City, especially in Greenwich Village. Stephen Petrus literally wrote the book on the topic and curated a recent multi-media exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York. In the iconic Caffè Vivaldi, join Stephen for an illustrated presentation that will trace the roots of the revival, its growth in New York, its major players, and its impact on American politics and culture during the tumultuous 1960s.

Three live music performances will follow Stephen's talk and you're encouraged to stay and enjoy the convivial atmosphere of the café.

What special small business would you like to see featured next? Just [click here](#) to fill out a brief form. Thank you!