

A BENEFIT EVENING FOR

THE VILLAGE TRIP

Celebrating the marriage of social justice and theater in Greenwich Village

Magic Times: Caffe Cino and the Birth of Off-Off Broadway

Featuring John Guare, Robert Heide, Magie Dominic and Jean-Claude van Itallie

Cornelia Street Cafe, Sunday, April 22. Drinks from 5.30pm, show at 6pm

In 1958, Joe Cino opened a storefront coffeehouse and art gallery at 31 Cornelia Street in Greenwich Village. It quickly became a hangout for young playwrights, many of them gay. On a makeshift stage made from milk cartons, ground-breaking careers were born. Writers who would go on to award-winning success on Broadway and beyond got their start at Caffe Cino – and at a time when Philip Roth felt free to deride Edward Albee’s play *Tiny Alice* for its “ghastly pansy rhetoric.”

Artists were unpaid, entry the cost of a cup of coffee – Cino served the best cappuccino in the Village. “We were all very young; we were all innocent; we knew nothing,” Albee wrote years later in *Return to the Caffe Cino* (2007). “We lived in a kind of Eden called Greenwich Village... then the center of all the new arts... we all spent our time with each other’s work, learning and cribbing. One of the theater centers was Caffe Cino, where young playwrights who knew nothing about what they were supposed to be doing made exciting work, and the failures were as exciting as the successes.”

Robert Patrick, who dropped by on the way home to Texas from a summer job washing dishes in Maine, has described Cino as the “Ground Zero of the 1960s... a coffee-house, a theater, a brothel, a temple, a flophouse, a dope-ring, a launching-pad, an insane asylum, a safe-house and a sleeper cell for an unnamed revolution.” Patrick, whose first play *The Haunted Host* was premiered at Cino in 1964, was a pioneer of gay theater and was by 1972 “New York’s most produced playwright.” In 1974, he contributed three plays to London’s first gay theater season.

“Being different” was accepted in the Village for more than a century before Caffe Cino opened its doors. But that didn’t mean the so-called fairy clubs frequented by Walt Whitman weren’t raided. A decade before Stonewall finally made Greenwich Village “the place of liberation” (as James Baldwin’s tortured protagonist, Rufus Scott, puts it in *Another Country*), Caffe Cino was a safe haven for all those who were “different.” Long before PRIDE, Joe Cino – a teenage runaway – taught gay artists to have pride in their sexuality and their work. In so doing, he helped change the world.

“It’s magic time. Do your own thing,” Cino told the young writers who came to Cornelia Street, be they gay or straight, black or white. Joe was a mentor to a generation of writers and actors, among them H M Koutoukas, Robert Heide, Doric Wilson, John Guare, Lanford Wilson and Sam Shepard, and actors Helen Hanft, Bernadette Peters, Harvey Keitel and Al Pacino, as well as directors Marshall Mason and Tom O’Horgan, who went on to direct *Hair*, the rock musical which put the bohemian life of New York City literally center-stage.

In words and music, **Magic Times** will celebrate the contribution of Caffe Cino to theater and to gay rights. The Greenwich Village Society for History Preservation mounted a plaque which reads: “Joe Cino 1931-1967 – On this site in the Caffe Cino – 1958-1968 – artists brought theater into the modern era creating Off-Off Broadway and forever altering the performing arts worldwide.” It was unveiled on 28 April 2008 by John Guare, celebrated author of *Six Degrees of Separation* among other award-winning plays.

The Cornelia Street Cafe, where **Magic Times** will be staged, is next door to Joe Cino’s original Caffe where owner Robin Hirsch, “Minister of Culture, Wine Czar, Dean of Faculty”, carries on Cino’s remarkable work.

The event will be chaired by theater critic **Charles Isherwood**, and will feature discussion and music from writers and performers whose careers began on Cino’s hallowed stage, among them **John Guare**, the multi-award-winning author of *The House of Blue Leaves* and *Six Degrees of Celebration*; **Robert Heide**, whose plays include *West of the Moon* and *The Bed*, which was filmed by Andy Warhol, his first split-screen movie; **Magie Dominic**, poet, author, and curator of *Caffe Cino - History of Off-Off Broadway* at Lincoln Center; and **Jean-Claude van Itallie**, best-known for *America Hurrah* and *The Serpent*.

Tickets cost \$20 and can be booked [here](#).

The Village Trip is a celebration of the history, heritage and culture of Greenwich Village. It is a sponsored project of Fractured Atlas, a non-profit Arts service organisation. Fractured Atlas will receive grants for the charitable purposes of The Village Trip, provide oversight to ensure grants are used in accordance with grant agreements, and provide reports as required by the grantor. Contributions for the charitable purposes of The Village Trip must be made payable to Fractured Atlas and are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

The inaugural festival will take place from September 27 - 30, 2018. More information: www.TheVillageTrip.com

For further details please contact:

Liz Law, Executive Director, on 413 347 3929; email LizLaw@TheVillageTrip.com

Liz Thomson, co-founder and Executive Producer, on 00 44 7799 503414; email LizThomson@TheVillageTrip.com

Partners:

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