



**Testimony in Support of Designation of
The Caffe Cino, 31 Cornelia Street, Manhattan
Tax Map Block 590 Lot 47
June 4, 2019**

My name is Andrew Berman, and I am the Executive Director of Village Preservation. I am here today to express our support for the proposed designation of 31 Cornelia Street, former home of the Caffe Cino, for individual landmark designation.

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In 2006, Village Preservation proposed this building, along with several other other surrounding buildings, for landmark designation as part of the South Village Historic District, noting the critical LGBT and theatrical history of Caffe Cino and several other sites in the area. In 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the first phase of that proposed historic district, including 31 Cornelia Street as a significant building and noting its LGBT and theater history in the designation report. Thus unlike the other potential LGBT landmarks being considered today, 31 Cornelia Street and the Caffe Cino already have their LGBT history and other cultural significance noted and part of the rationale for designation. Nevertheless we are happy to see that history further recognized with individual landmark status, and support the proposed designation.

Caffe Cino is universally recognized as the birthplace of the Off-Off Broadway Theater movement, as well as for the critical role it played in nurturing experimental theater and in providing a forum for openly gay playwrights and actors to share material related to gay and lesbian identity when few such opportunities existed. Because of this extraordinary level of openness provided by Caffe operator Joe Cino, himself a gay man, the Caffe became a hub of creative innovation and accessibility, freeing playwrights and actors from the constraints normally associated with conventional theater, even Off-Broadway. Artists including Lanford Wilson, John Guare, Sam Shephard, Doric Wilson, and Jean-Claude van Itallie among many others got their start there. Though it only lasted ten years, Caffé Cino's impact, especially in the pre-Stonewall years which were characterized by pervasive oppression and silencing of LGBT voices, was immeasurable. Caffe Cino was certainly one of the most influential cultural venues at the time in a neighborhood with an extraordinary – perhaps even unprecedented – number of such venues during this era. We are proud to count the Caffé Cino as part of the rich cultural legacy of Greenwich Village, and to see the impact it had upon the broader culture recognized.

Thirteen years after first proposing the Caffe Cino for landmark designation as part of the South Village Historic District, we are happy to be able to stand before you today to urge you to vote to designate this site a New York City landmark.