



MA NUYORICAN CINDERELLA AT BRONX LAB

By Howard Giske

In homage to Women's History month, Maria Aponte, a seasoned actor and writer, read from her book "Transitions of a Nuyorican Cinderella" at Bronx Musical Heritage Lab (BMHC). She is a Puerto Rican woman, raised in New York City, telling of her journey from rags to something better. In her 30s, she discovered she could write, and published her own book out of the many essays she wrote. Topics range from her and other's struggles, to a poem dedicated to her husband, saying that "this love doesn't come every day." Aponte has lived in El Barrio in Manhattan, and also in the Bronx, and now works at Fordham University. Her book includes writings from 1979 to 2006.

Aponte tells of real life, in poetry and prose. She speaks of the chaos where "Baby's crying. Where's Papo? ...A car collides on Tremont Avenue. It's summertime." She remembers growing up young and naïve and saw others "trying to look like a woman she'd never be. She was 16... Brown hips, red lips, hot skin." The

young woman is disarmed, in love with "her cute boy friend." Later the same woman is raising her daughters, often by herself.

While many of Aponte's writings reflect her struggles living in New York City, she also reached resolution, learning to have pride in her accomplishments. Her work reflects universal values, because though she grew up Puerto Rican, her neighborhood included Cubans, Italians and others. People spoke different languages, but women understood when a neighbor rang the doorbell asking for a cup of sugar.

A few months ago, Aponte wrote a poem and performed at a South Bronx Poetry event at the South Bronx Documentary Center in Melrose, where six photographers displayed black and white photographs of the South Bronx of the 1970s, a place and time that has largely disappeared. Aponte recalls it "like blood running through veins," with "children being children... playing good cop, bad cop... dancing salsa in the middle of the



street." She feels tension because she has become educated and has developed past her old identity. In another poem, "So You Think I Left You" she proclaims that she is still from the old neighborhood though she doesn't speak Spanish all the time, and she is not always eating rice and beans. She has added the English and American poets Shelly, Keats and Wordsworth to her repertoire. This is part of the experience of being what Aponte calls, a "civil rights baby." She remembers Martin Luther King speaking passionately of civil rights. So, she didn't "leave the block," at least metaphorically, she is just using her privileges of being

free to enter areas that once were marked "for whites only." Aponte was backed up by the soft rhythms of Yvette Martinez, dancer and Nancy Friedman, percussion from the multi-ethnic all-female music dance ensemble, Retumba! Later, Martinez led the audience in a conga line leading in song and dance, while Friedman kept a loud and persistent beat. BMHC, located at 1303 Louis Nine Blvd., Bronx, NY, will present the Mariachi Academy of New York on Thursday, April 18th at 7:30. For more info, see <http://bronxmusic.org>.

MTA Restores Historic Bronx Subway Station House to Original Grandeur

The MTA's top-to-bottom rehabilitation of the East 180th Street 2/5 subway station rededicated today has recaptured the grandeur its original builders had in mind when the century-old North Bronx transit terminal served as the administration building for the old New York, Westchester and Boston Railway system.

The two-year, \$66.5 million project breathed new life into the unique subway station that serves the 2 and 5 lines and is a major link to two major Bronx attractions - the Bronx Zoo and the New York Botanical Gardens. Designed and built during a period when riding the rails was a grand experience rather than bookends to a work day, the structure is a handsome example of early 20th Century architectural design that has long stood as a community landmark.

"This beautifully renovated station is a tribute to the Bronx and provides an uplifting experience for everyone who passes through it," said MTA Acting Chairman Fernando Ferrer. "I'm very pleased the MTA has restored an element of the Bronx's glory while improving the daily commutes of its residents."

The stucco, red terra cotta-tiled roof building boasts a pair of four-story towers, entry courtyard and a handsome clock, which replicates the original timepiece in place when the structure was built. The building was designed with arches and balconies that give it the distinct look of an Italian villa. On the exterior is a restored plaque topped with the head of Mercury, the Roman god of transportation.

"The subject of this project serves to demonstrate the architectural variety of the New York City subway system and the care and effort that goes into maintaining the system and restoring elements to their original appearance," said NYC Transit President Thomas F. Prendergast. "The East 180th Street Station was built to a grand design by its original operator and we have taken the opportunity to return it to as close to its original condition as possible."

"Transit plays such an important role in the vitality of the Bronx, and this incredible renovation of one of our great transit hubs is sure to be appreciated by the thousands of commuters who use this station on a daily basis," said Bronx

Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.

"These renovations are a major shot in the arm for the thousands of straphangers who use the East 180th Street Station for their daily commute. This station is certainly one of the oldest in the Bronx, but also one of the oldest and most vital in the entire city," said Council Member James Vacca, Chairman of the New York City Council Transportation Committee. "Not only do these renovations now include full accessibility to handicapped straphangers with a ramp and elevator, but it has given a beautiful facelift to a station that has been serving our city for over 100 years."

"Today we celebrate 100 years of operation at this historic station where over 2 million riders pass annually. This rehabilitation was imperative to ensure the safety and continuation of service to the passengers throughout the City of New York, especially to the Bronx and the outer boroughs," said Councilman Joel Rivera.

Work on the station required restoration of the landmark building's exterior walls, windows, stucco work, roof tiles wood doors and mezzanine areas. Of course, this type of work required skilled craftspeople. There are two retail spaces in the station's lobby, as well as NYC Transit employee facilities for Rapid Transit Operations, Signals and Structures.

"This was a tremendously rewarding job, bringing the station back up to a state of good repair and restoring the aesthetic features that make it stand out. East 180th Street will be a welcoming structure for Bronx subway customers for many decades to come," said Program Officer Dilip Patel.

Major portions of the project, designed by Lee Harris Pomeroy Architects, included the refurbishment of the mezzanine passage with new tile work and ornamental mosaic bands and the introduction of mosaic panels designed under guidance of the MTA Arts for Transit program. The station's side entrance has been rehabilitated and the designs of both passageways are marked by large spans of structural steel overhead, painted a pale green the same as they were when the station was first opened. New lighting has been installed on the building's interior and exterior, making the station as attractive by night as by



Borough President Diaz was joined by State Senator Rev. Ruben Diaz, NYC Transit President Thomas F. Prendergast, Acting Chairman of the MTA and former Borough President Fernando Ferrer and City Council majority Leader Joel Rivera, among others.

day.

The elevated subway platforms have similarly been rehabilitated, including new platforms, edge safety tiles, canopies and track beds. ADA compliance is achieved through a new pathway that allows wheelchair access and the installation of two elevators that link the mezzanine to the platforms.

New tile work and ornamental mosaic bands and panels have been installed. Designed by artist Luisa Caldwell under the MTA Arts for Transit program, the panels reflect the surrounding area and the nearby Bronx Zoo and New York Botanical Gardens.

One important element was donated to the project by construction contractor Citmalta. Company President Mike Gargiulo visited the job and felt that the historic building was missing just one thing - a clock. Having studied historical preservation in college, he thought a clock would add a lot to the project.

Some electronic sleuthing turned up old images showing the original clock. A similar item

was sourced from Electric Time Co. in Massachusetts. The old images were sent up to them and they suggested a clock that would fit the design of the early 20th Century transportation building.

"We at Citmalta, with NYC Transit's and Lee Harris Pomeroy's permission, donated the clock and the installation, because we thought it completed the look, making a great renovation just a little bit nicer," said Gargiulo.

The northern segment of the 5 train, known as the Dyre Avenue Line of the New York City subway system, was once part of an electrified commuter railway connecting the South Bronx with White Plains and Port Chester in Westchester County.

Owned by the New Haven Railroad, the New York Westchester and Boston Railway were short-lived, in service only between 1912 and 1937. New York City took ownership of the Bronx portion of the line in 1940 and tied into the IRT at East 180th Street.