



Arts

## **Bronx Music Heritage Center Expanding, Celebrating Borough's Art Scene**

May 22, 2017 Pandoras Box 0 Comment

Photo Credit: Joseph Powell

By Joseph Powell

It's a quiet spring afternoon and it's quiet on the block at 1303 Louis Nine Blvd. up in the Bronx. It is here where the Bronx Music Heritage Center is located. But despite it being a holiday week and spring break for many, the BMHC is alive and well with its mission to promote the ever growing musical culture of the Bronx.

The center houses an art gallery and a performance space for established and local arts. At a recent jazz event held at the center, the co-artistic director, Grammy nominated bandleader and drummer Bobby Sanabria spoke of the glorious past of the Bronx with its many clubs and musicians who have lived and performed in the borough.

"The BMHC is not here to relive it, but to remind you of it," Sanabria told the crowd. "The Bronx is not just about hip-hop, but jazz, salsa and doo-wop to name a few."

The Women's Housing + Economic Development Corporation founded BMHC in 2010. The organization's main purpose was to start and fund women's housing. Along the way, WHEDCO decided to start a cultural arm and that is what led to the creation of the center.

Elena Martinez, who along with Sanabria, is a co-artistic director at the center. In a recent interview she spoke of the center's goal to promote the various music forms like hip-hop, jazz and salsa along with having dance and guitar classes.

"We want people to have a good time," said Martinez. "Anyone can put on a concert. But we want people to walk away with some knowledge of the borough."

Both Martinez and Sanabria have pointed out that the Bronx has many stereotypical images attached to it. They have spoken on the eras of the burned out buildings, crime, drugs and trash-strewn vacant lots. But they want people to fully understand that there is a lot to the Bronx.

"The Bronx is an extension of Harlem," said Martinez. "Many African-Americans left Harlem and moved up to the Bronx. Many Latinos from East Harlem moved up to the Bronx. Many first settling in

the Mott Haven section. This was happening in the 1950's. The number 5 and 6 trains made it convenient to live and work here. There were many factory jobs up here in the Bronx."

The work that the BMHC and WHEDCO do promotes and involves the community. There are many community organizations within the boroughs that serve their neighborhood.

Charise Panton is in her 40's and lives in Central Harlem. Panton and her boyfriend both work full time and are raising their five year old daughter. While her busy schedule doesn't allow time for her to seek out culturally based organizations, Panton is grateful for the 123rd Block Association in her area.

"They do a great job by serving the block and existing area up here," she said. "The best part is that they serve the youth up here. They involve the parents by holding fundraisers so that they can buy school supplies and gifts for the neighborhood children."

The Bronx Museum of the Arts is located at 1040 Grand Concourse and 165th Street. It has been in existence for over twenty years now. It not only has art exhibitions, but programs that serve the community. One particular event is 'First Fridays,' held on the first Friday of each month to present cultural events.

Miriam Tabb works as a public liaison for the museum and in a recent interview said, "We have concerts that feature gospel, jazz, Latin, African, and world music," said Tabb. "We also have dance performances, lectures, film screenings and poetry readings. The community comes out for these events."

The events for this program, which are a little over five years old, are not randomly chosen.

"We have the Bronx Museum Community Advisory Council which is made up of 25 to 30 people," said Tabb. "The members can submit a theme idea and if it is chosen, the member behind the idea will create the program for a chosen date. They create a theme with the community in mind and that adds to it as well."

While Martinez realizes that the BMHC is promoting history, she is fully aware that new immigrant groups are moving into the borough bringing their own culture and music.

"We know that the Bronx is becoming more and more diverse," said Martinez. "We have had West African and Bangladesh events and are working on having Albanian events. There is a large Albanian community in the Bronx that is growing."

She points to a recent jazz concert that was held on April 8 that featured Serbian born singer Alma Micic.

Outside on Louis Nine Blvd is Bronx resident Denise Byrd. She is on her way to the city unaware of BMHC, but was impressed. "I always pass by this area and didn't know about them," said Byrd. "I think it's great for the community to have a place like this. I will go online and check them out."

The BMHC will be able to reach more people in the future. They recently broke ground on East 162nd Street and Elton Avenue. This street located in the Melrose Section of the Bronx will be WHEDCO's third housing development site. It will be comprised of 305 new affordable apartments and retail space. This new development will allow BMHC to be in a larger space and will include a 300-seat theater for performances. It will be called, 'The Bronx Music Hall' and it will showcase the forgotten music of the Bronx as well as emerging artists.

But whether it's the current small or the upcoming larger space, Martinez wants people to come to the center and learn something.

"Both me and Bobby are from the Bronx and we are passionate about the Bronx," she said. "There is so much history about the Bronx."

<http://yorkpbnews.net/arts/bronx-music-heritage-center-expanding-celebrating-boroughs-art-scene/>