

## Vinyl visions Visiones de vinilo

Story by: Gregg McQueen | Posted by: Erik Cuello in Arts, Education, Español, Local, News July 15, 2015

### Photos courtesy of BMHC

A listen – and a look.

Latin music lovers can now enjoy double their pleasure, thanks to a new Bronx exhibition that spotlights the evolution of Latin music album cover art over the last 50 years.

Presented by the Bronx Music Heritage Center (BMHC), the “Visual Clave” exhibit showcases original album art and LP covers from the golden era of Latin vinyl, paying attention to issues of identity through depictions of Hispanic people and cultures.

Pablo Yglesias, a Latin music DJ and percussionist who curated the exhibit, said he wanted to emphasize the historical context of the album covers, and also pay tribute to the unsung graphic artists who helped present Latin music to the world.

“Visual Clave’s premise is that the record jacket is not just an ephemeral, mass-produced object to be relegated to the trash heap of a bygone era, but rather a unique 12-by-12-inch window onto a culture’s soul,” stated Yglesias.

The name “Visual Clave” comes from the African-derived 2-3 or 3-2 beat used in almost all genres of Latin music, as well as the wooden percussion sticks used to mark these syncopated time signatures. Both meanings of “clave” – the beat and the instrument – can be viewed as a symbol of Hispanic cultural identities and practices.

All of the exhibit’s artwork once graced the covers of vinyl records by famous Latin music figures, most of whom were either born or resided in the Bronx.

“These album covers and the people behind the scenes that created them represent a moment in time when the music that today we call salsa was firing on all cylinders,” commented Bobby Sanabria, Co-Artistic Director of BMHC.



"We're demonstrating that the music has a majestic history tied to New York's Latino community and it is represented visually in the artwork on the albums," he said.

Sanabria, also a percussionist, composer and producer who has been nominated for seven Grammy awards, said that the displayed album art is primarily from rare vinyl releases. Of note is the original artwork for Willie Colón's 1970 album *La Gran Fuga/The Big Break*, which featured Colón's face on a mock FBI "wanted" poster.

"The cover art had to be recalled after the album's release — it was causing chaos because many people were actually calling the FBI offices, telling them about Willie's whereabouts," explained Sanabria. "If you have the original album, it's a collector's item," he said.

"Visual Clave" can be seen until August 15 at BMHC's Lab, located on Louis Niñé Boulevard in Crotona East.

Developed by the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp., BMHC presents live music performances, film screenings, educational programs, art installations and music-history trolley tours of the neighborhood.

The Center's Lab is now in a temporary home — in 2017, BMHC will move to a permanent site within a brand new complex in the Melrose neighborhood.

As part of "Visual Clave," a lecture on the history of Fania Records, a label famous for its promotion of salsa music, will be held on August 14, followed by a concert performed by Sanabria, Gilberto "Pulpo" Colón, Gene Jefferson, Eddie Montalvo and others.

The Bronx exhibition is presented concurrently with one in Brooklyn, as both boroughs have given rise to successful Latin music scenes over the last 50 years.

"At one time, the Bronx had, per capita, more nightclubs, theaters and dancehalls than any other borough," said Sanabria.

This earned the Bronx the nickname of "El condado de la salsa" ("The borough of salsa"), a legacy Sanabria feels isn't well-known to the younger generation.

"The Bronx is the musical incubator for the city," remarked Sanabria. "It's not just hip hop, but jazz, salsa, doo wop, R&B, funk, you name it. It's our mission to honor this incredible history and let the rest of the world know about it."

*The Bronx Music Heritage Center Lab is located at 1303 Louis Niñé Boulevard, Bronx NY. "Visual Clave" can be viewed until August 15. Exhibition hours are Mondays/Tuesdays/Thursdays from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., and Saturdays from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, visit [www.bronxmusic.org](http://www.bronxmusic.org).*

[Original story published in The Bronx Free Press](#)