

**EAT AND DRINK**

# **Bronx Night Market shines a spotlight on native food vendors like CaSpanish**

Keith and Judy Cyrus of CaSpanish served their Caribbean-inflected Spanish food at the first-ever Bronx Night Market Saturday.



CaSpanish is a family affair, born of Judy and Keith Cyrus catering their own 2015 wedding and son Deion, now 7, contributing the name. Photo Credit: Laughinghouse

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For Judy and Keith Cyrus, the journey to Saturday's Bronx Night Market — a new open-air, monthly festival assembling more than 40 food vendors in Fordham Plaza — began with a wedding.

Their own, in fact. When the couple began planning their 2015 nuptials, they knew they wanted to serve food reflecting their Caribbean heritage at the reception. (Judy's family is Puerto Rican and Dominican, Keith's Trinidadian.)

"First it was difficult finding a place that would make the pork that Judy liked and the sweet potatoes I liked, things from our traditional backgrounds. When we finally found those places, the cost was more than the actual wedding," Keith Cyrus recalls.



Mini-empanadas are one of CaSpanish's signature dishes. Photo Credit: CaSpanish

“A week before the wedding, I said to Judy, ‘What if we catered it?’”

And so they did, drawing on their experience cooking crab legs, mac ‘n’ cheese and empanadas for friends, and drafting their families into the kitchen.

“My mom helped cook. Judy’s dad made his famous potato salad,” Cyrus says of the feast served in the fellowship hall at Mt. Sinai Baptist Church in Brooklyn. “It was really a family affair.”

For months after the August wedding, guests couldn’t stop talking about the food; that feedback was the push the husband and wife, who live in Soundview and are both 33, needed to make their [catering company](#) official by early 2016.

When a friend asked Cyrus what the nascent business was called, it was a running family joke that popped into his head: “CaSpanish.”

The word is a neologism coined years ago by the court officer’s 7-year-old son Deion. “He hears Spanish often, but whenever his grandmother, Judy’s mom, would speak Spanish, he would say, ‘Why is abuela speaking, CaSpanish?’ and we would laugh,” Cyrus says. The family never understood where the word came from, but in it, they heard a portmanteau of “Caribbean” and “Spanish,” which describes exactly the food Keith and Judy make — Spanish with a Caribbean twist.

By May 2017, CaSpanish had obtained its required permits and forged connections with the Bronx Brewery and the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation through a free incubator for aspiring food entrepreneurs run by the Queens Library, Jamaica Feasts. At the beginning of this year, the couple moved the catering operation out of their own Bronx apartment into a shared kitchen operated by the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation.

Their signatures are mini empanadas, mac 'n' cheese, crab legs, and chicken and coquito waffles, an original dish that incorporates Judy's Puerto Rican eggnog recipe into Belgian waffle batter.

On Saturday, they served \$5 plates of curry goat, rice and peas, codfish cakes, sweet plantain and cabbage salad. And yes, Deion was there to do his part.

"It's like a dream come true, to go from cooking in our kitchen to being in a shared kitchen space to being able to share our food with the public," Cyrus says of the opportunity to showcase CaSpanish's food at the [Bronx Night Market](#), a collaboration between quarterly magazine Edible Bronx and Bronx-based creative agency BLOX. (In the long term, the couple would like to launch their own restaurants in New York, Atlanta and Florida, where they have extended family.)

The food festival, Cyrus says, "brings awareness to the local community that there's so much more food available than what you see on commercials, or in physical stores. ... There are people doing amazing things with food and there are just so many options ... here in the Bronx, where there's such a variety of culture."

On the diverse roster of food vendors who served their wares are those behind the Mott Haven restaurant Habanero Mexican Cuisine, the Belmont Albanian eatery Cka Ka Qellu and Millie Peartree's Fish Fry & Soul Food, in Fordham Manor.

Link: <https://www.amny.com/eat-and-drink/bronx-night-market-food-1.19481182>