

Caregiving a Legendary Bronx Musician



Photographer Rhynna M. Santos at #papielmaestro, her exhibit at the BMHC that chronicles the life of Ray Santos, her famous musician father. (photo: Gary Axelbank)

by Gary Axelbank

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[Rhynna M. Santos](#) has been able to blend two of her life's passions: photography and caregiving for her father, Ray Santos, who happens to be one of Latin music's most renowned figures. 'Papi', as she affectionally calls him, grew up in the Bronx on Jennings Street and played his tenor sax and arranged and composed with numerous music giants, including all three Mambo Kings, Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, and Machito.



Part Two of #papielmaestro at the BMHC (photo: Gary Axelbank)

Now through March 30, Rhynna's photography show, *#papielmaestro* is on display at WHEDco's [Bronx Music Heritage Center](#) (BMHC) at 1303 Louis Nine Blvd. The three-part exhibition delves into her changing relationship with her father, how she knew him as a little girl when he was pursuing his iconic career, how other people got to know Papi, and now as his caregiver, how she sees her father today.

“I wanted to respectfully document the aging process and the inevitable decline that happens,” she told [thisistheBronX](#) during a weekday afternoon visit to the BMHC and personal tour of the exhibition. “As I continued to live with my father, the care became more intense and it came through in my images.”



Ray Santos takes a stroll in Soundview, 2017. (photo: Rhynna M. Santos)

Santos, now 90 years old, doesn't play his instrument any longer, but he's still vital as a composer, conductor, and arranger. In taking up photography, Rhynna found an additional way to connect with him: a creative collaboration between daughter and father.

“To be as respected as he is in the industry and to have this person who has won a lifetime Grammy and has been so decorated, it is a big deal that he actually gives me a lot of advice,” she said. “He is my biggest role model in the art world.”



Ray Santos (L) and his grandson, Enrique, 2018 (photo: Rhynna M. Santos)

Rhynna, who teaches digital photography to older adults at the Mitchell Senior Center on Lincoln Avenue, admits that as he's gotten older she's gotten to know him

in ways that she never knew him before. Now that she's intimately involved in the rudiments of caregiving, she monitors every meal he eats, every doctor's appointment, his hygiene, and his choice of clothing.

That's why, along with the exhibition, on **Thursday, March 21, at 7:00pm**, BMHC will host [Creating While Caregiving](#) an expert panel discussion on the challenges of creating art while caring for a loved one.

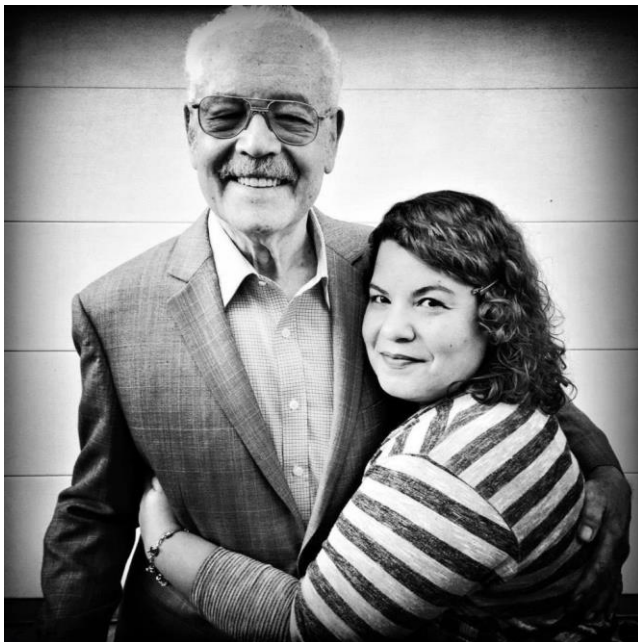


Ray Santos listening to his grandson, Colin, practice the violin in 2015.
(photo: Rhyanna M. Santos)

“This photo exhibit intersects with our mission to blend music and culture,” said Elena Martinez, the BMHC Co-Artistic Director. “We advocate for so many artists who don’t have safety nets of any type, who don’t have medical insurance and don’t have pensions. This is part of the continuum of what musicians and artists need.”

In 2011 CUNY Media profiled Ray Santos

Along with the documenting of his life story, Rhyanna’s message with *#papielmaestro* is to illustrate how taxing caregiving can be, especially with a close-up view as old age deteriorates one of the world’s great talents.



Father and daughter, 2017 (photo: Rhyanna M. Santos)

“Some of these images represent a lot of pain for me because sometimes as a caregiver you feel really alone and isolated,” she said. “But if we were more open, I think caregivers would feel more able to share those experiences. Instead of looking at aging as this horrible thing, I hope my photo show with my dad will really celebrate a well-lived life.”

Link: <https://www.thisisthebronx.info/caregiving-a-legendary-bronx-musician/>