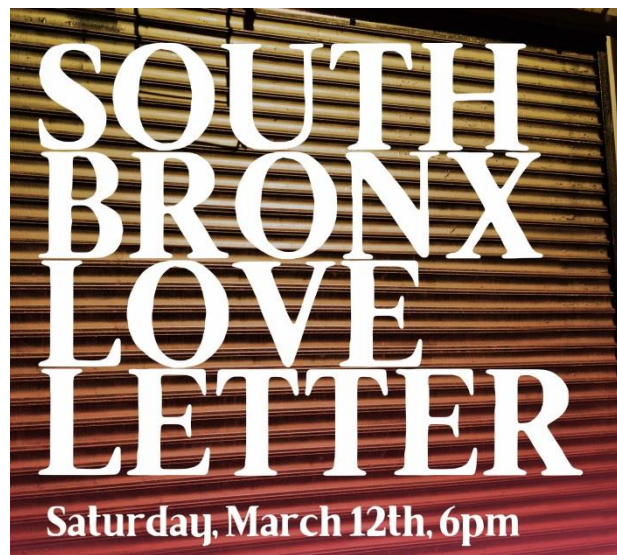

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Bronx Event to Celebrate Longtime Residents Threatened by Gentrification

By [Eddie Small](#) | March 4, 2016 4:09pm

SOUTH BRONX — Hakiem Yahmadi, 64, has spent almost his entire life living in The Bronx

He's been around for several of the most landmark events of the borough's recent history: [President Jimmy Carter's visit](#), the blackouts of 1965 and 1977, and numerous great Yankee teams dating back to the days of Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle.



"It was a closely knit neighborhood in which everybody on the block knew everybody from one end to the other end," he said. "It was that village concept."

Yahmadi's time in The Bronx encompasses both its notorious years of abandoned buildings and its subsequent rebuilding, but he is aware that, despite his lengthy history in the borough, he may not be able to afford to live there moving forward based on the wave of investment and development coming to the area.

"Things are changing. I mean, you see it in Harlem. You see it when you travel around," he said.

"It's just a matter of time before it comes to the South Bronx."

An upcoming event at the [Bronx Music Heritage Center](#) aims to celebrate the experiences of longtime borough residents like Yahmadi who are now facing issues of [gentrification](#), rebranding and rezoning.

The free event is called [South Bronx Love Letter](#) and will be an evening of art, music and discussion centered on issues like immigration and displacement. It is being put on by the [Five Boro Story Project](#), an organization that produces events showcasing art inspired by New York City neighborhoods.

"I wanted to do a program that would just honor the history of the South Bronx and celebrate the people who never left," said Five Boro Story Project creator [Bridget Bartolini](#), "who lived through the hard times and aren't just discovering it as if it's something new but who endured through good and bad."

The impetus for the event was last year's controversy over the [Piano District](#) billboard that went up by the Third Avenue Bridge, which many Bronxites viewed as an attempt to gentrify and rebrand their borough, and a party that real estate developers Somerset Partners and the Chetrit Group held with bullet-ridden cars and burning trash cans that locals found offensive.

[Keith Rubenstein](#), founder and principal of Somerset Partners, has since taken the billboard down in response to community concerns and said [it was never meant to imply that he was trying to rebrand the South Bronx](#).

"The criticism of the party and billboard underscored the need for us to do a better job of engaging with the community," he said in a statement. "After all, we share many of the same goals — new jobs, public open space, opportunities for local artists — and our work is oriented around achieving those goals."

South Bronx Love Letter will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. on March 12 at 1303 Louis Niñé Blvd. and feature songs inspired by the borough from the artist Not4Prophet, along with stories about his own experiences growing up in The Bronx.

"We're seeing, basically, the forces of displacement kind of moving up and up and up and up," Not4Prophet said, "so yeah, it's always going to be about the struggle against displacement and gentrification."

After the musical performance, everyone at the event will be invited to share their own stories and memories, as well as contribute to a love note to the borough.

Bartolini stressed that the event was open to everybody, not just artists and performers, because everyone has a story to tell.

"When people are listening to another person's story, it naturally makes us reminisce, so we're going to do a story circle that will have everyone talking about the neighborhood and just sharing their memories, connecting with neighbors," she said.

The event will be presented in coordination with the "Memories Un-Remembered" exhibit from the [BxArts Factory](#), a collection focusing on themes like gentrification, displacement and immigration.

Yahmadi said he planned to attend the event, maintaining that people needed to start paying more attention to issues like gentrification.

"That's something that's out there, and we need to have a conversation about it. It's happening. It's happening everywhere," he said. "One of the real problems is that people are not paying attention to what's happening around them."

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