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Booth Delivers Bronx Sounds Under the Din

Boogie Down Booth Beneath IRT Combines Bus Stop With Bronx Music

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Beneath the rust and peeling green paint of the elevated IRT station at Freeman Street in the Bronx, the Boogie Down Booth looks out of place.

The brightly colored structure is a cross between a sound booth and a bus stop, providing seating while playing homegrown South Bronx music.

The booth, which opened on Wednesday, is the second installation of an initiative called Under the Elevated, which seeks to reclaim some of the space underneath New York City's nearly 700 miles of elevated track.



Rap group Circa '95 performs. Andrew Lamberson for The Wall Street Journal

"These spaces are often noisy, dark and kind of scary," said Susan Chin, executive director of Design Trust for Public Space, a nonprofit organization focusing on public space in New York City that coordinated the booth project. "We're trying to create a space you might want to hang out or meet your friends."

The solar-powered booth plays a mix of songs, from hip-hop and jazz to mariachi music, from directional speakers which are above the head of the listener. It is almost impossible to hear the music, unless seated beneath the canopy of the installation.

The project is a collaboration by the Design Trust, local nonprofit organizations and agencies such as the city Transportation Department and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Boogie Down Booth was funded by a mix of federal and city funds in addition to private donations.

Among the Bronx musicians featured in the booth is Living Colour, whose drummer, Will Calhoun, a Grammy Award winning drummer who attended the Wednesday opening.

"A lot of the music that came out of this borough went out and changed the world," Mr. Calhoun said. "This is a beautiful thing to see it here blended with the sounds of the trains and the taxi cabs, next to the fruit vendors and the Chinese restaurants."

The area around the Freeman Street stop has gained a safer reputation in recent years, according to residents. New affordable housing, along with projects such as the Boogie Down Booth, are making it possible, they say.

"It's changed considerably for the better," said Nathan Riley, 67 years old, who has lived in the area for the past seven years. "People actually feel like they can be on the streets at night now. They don't have to be afraid. This is just another positive step."

Nancy Biberman, whose organization, the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp., was one of those helping to open the Boogie Down Booth, sees the installation as part of a larger revitalization of the South Bronx. Her group opened 150 affordable-housing units in the Morrisania section of the Bronx in 2008.



The Boogie Down Booth at the Freeman Street IRT station Andrew Lamberson for The Wall Street Journal



Booth music history Andrew Lamberson for The Wall Street Journal

"It's not just about putting up one affordable-housing development, it's about changing people's perceptions of a place," said Ms. Biberman. "It takes more than apartments and a grocery store to make a neighborhood. It takes culture."

The group plans to build another affordable-housing development in the South Bronx and reserve 15% of the apartments for elderly musicians. It also hopes to create other sound installations like the Boogie Down Booth further south along the No. 2 and 5 lines.

As Justin Carter, a 24-year old music instructor, was skateboarding by the booth, he stopped to check it out and was pleased with the addition to the neighborhood.

"You don't really see stuff like this in other places," he said, as he sat listening to the music. "It's great to be able to hear what's being created in your own neighborhood."

Corrections & Amplifications

An earlier version of this article incorrectly said the state Transportation Department was part of the collaboration working on the Boogie Down Booth.