



BRONX*Times*

Bronx music history - and future - has new center

By Bob Kappstatter

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From Latin to jazz to Hip Hop, the Bronx lays claim to a host of musical greats.

Now a local organization plans to preserve that history and move the borough's musical talent forward with a new Bronx Music Heritage Center.

The Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp. has received a \$175,000 Cultural Innovation Fund grant from The Rockefeller Foundation for two years of cross-cultural performances by its new center from its temporary digs.

As WHEDco puts it, the center will preserve and promote the area's extraordinary but largely forgotten cultural legacy, and help germinate new Bronx-based work.

BMHC is slated to open in WHEDco's new Bronx Commons development in the Melrose neighborhood in 2015.

With performance, rehearsal, and archival space, BMHC will serve as a hub for celebrating and disseminating the locally born influential musical forms.

BMHC has already begun its programming with live performances, educational programs, archival work, and the opening of a "Pop Up Shop" called the BMHC Laboratory.

Temporarily headquartered in a storefront at WHEDco's Crotona East development, the BMHC Lab is a center for incubating new work, cultivating a community of artists, and bringing together audience members.

WHEDco President Nancy Biberman expressed gratitude to The Rockefeller Foundation for their generous support, saying it will allow BMHC "to draw on local talent to restore the rich music heritage of the South Bronx, creating a cultural destination for visitors and a vibrant community of opportunity for residents."

The Rockefeller grant is one of a number of major leading grants fueling development of programming.

In May, the Kresge Foundation awarded WHEDco \$150,000 for its BMHC concert series honoring Bronx musicians, cultural events, engagement of local musicians, scholars, and community leaders, and the building of a Bronx music archive.

Also in May, the New York Community Trust made a \$50,000 grant to support BMHC educational programming, with hands-on arts experiences and mentoring to Bronx youth.

In June, via its Working Capital program, Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation provided a three-year commitment of \$225,000 in grants and soft loans to support WHEDco's development of the Bronx Commons site as well as programming for the BMHC.

The City Council has also made a \$2.5 million capital appropriation towards building Bronx Commons (total building costs will total \$138 million).

Bronx Commons will be a 361,000-square-foot mixed-use campus featuring over 250 affordable, "green" apartments for families and live/work space for elder musicians; a 6-12 grade school; rooftop farm; and public green space.

It will be the final site developed in the 30-block Melrose Urban Renewal Area with a history of neglect and blight going back to the 1970s.