

BIG CITY

# Tributes to Hip-Hop Pioneers Help Cultivate New Messages

By SUSAN DOMINUS  
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Whenever Victor Arzu approaches the corner of East 169th Street and Franklin Avenue in his grandmother’s neighborhood, Morrisania, in the South Bronx, he usually takes a moment to check out some posters on a wall depicting the hip-hop artist Grandmaster Flash. Right underneath the image, in stencil-like lettering, the poster tells him: “Grandmaster Flash played the records they clapped for/ back when the dancefloor was packed at the Black Door.”

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John Marshall Mantel for The New York Times  
Grandmaster Flash is one of 10 artists honored in a project noting the Bronx’s hip-hop roots.

“I was like, wow, I didn’t know he was from around here,” said Mr. Arzu, who, at 19, is too young to [remember the days](#) in the ’70s when that artist first started entertaining crowds at a small club on Boston Road, just a block away, called the Black Door.

The poster did not exactly announce where the Black Door had been, but Mr. Arzu gathered it must have been nearby. Mr. Arzu, who lives in the Forest Houses, a public housing project in the Bronx, had seen similar posters of the hip-hop artist Fat Joe in his own neighborhood, where he knew that artist had grown up. He figured the posters in his grandmother’s neighborhood were doing the same thing, commemorating a local legend.

Mr. Arzu had no idea who had put the posters up, but he was glad they did. “It goes to show that when hip-hop started, that a lot of greats came from here in the Bronx,” he said. “It makes me proud.”

The origin of the posters, which were posted last November in 10 historical hip-hop sites around the city, is not exactly what you would call street. Claudia Bennett and Masha Ioveva, two multimedia artists at R/GA, a digital advertising agency near Times Square, were inspired by a request from the Bronx Council on the Arts (which ultimately had no hand in their project) to generate a digital experience for the borough that would celebrate its culture. They decided to create posters that would showcase the hip-hop history of the Bronx, and that would also invite passers-by to add their own rhymes by text message to [Bronxrhymes.org](#), creating a virtual space for rhyming battles.

The two women, using funding they received from a digital arts organization, hired a designer to work up the posters, and asked a work colleague, an informal hip-hop obsessive named Steve Caputo, to work up the rhymes. The two women had approached a few hip-hop artists, and one did deliver a few. “But Steve’s were better,” said Ms. Bennett.

The humor in their devotion to the project wasn’t lost on Ms. Bennett. “There we were one Saturday morning, three white girls, two of whom are Bulgarian” — Ms. Ioveva, who is Bulgarian, brought a friend — “out there wheat-pasting posters, driving around in some Mazda rental car,” she recalled.

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