

The Bronx

B

laqlist

By Tim W. Brown

A list you'll want to be on.



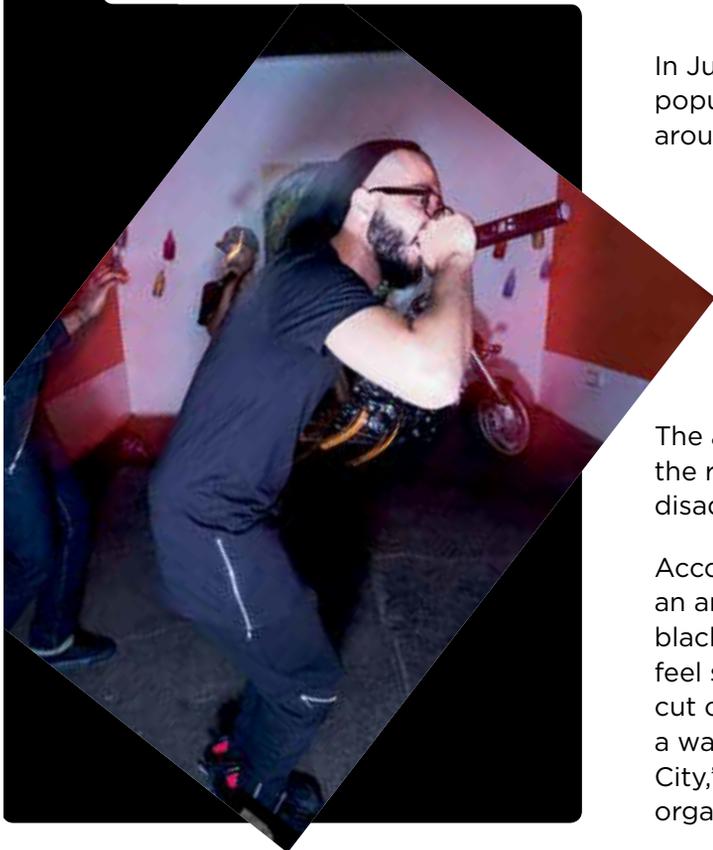
In July 2014 the founders of the Bronx Blaqlist, a population of creative people living in the Bronx, looked around the borough and saw a huge cultural void.

Said co-founder Rosaly Ruiz,

“No other borough has been ostracized more so than the Bronx.”

The access to culture and opportunities for artists that the residents of other boroughs enjoy, even the most disadvantaged, was missing.

According to Ruiz, being a creative Bronxite; that is an artist living in the Bronx, is synonymous with being blacklisted. The borough's artists, musicians, and writers feel segregated and culturally underserved, as well as cut off from the "art and trends that have long been a way of life for those living in the rest of New York City," said Ruiz. In reaction to this state of affairs, the organization proudly adopted the name "Bronx Blaqlist."



Despite being one of the poorest counties in the United States, “the Bronx has proven itself as a mecca of modern music and fashion,” said Ruiz.

“It’s rich not only in colorful people, but in passion and significant cultural contributions.”

The Bronx Blaqlist is dedicated to “bringing focus to the spirit we helped create here in the Bronx, through creative endeavors, social events, and community activism,” she said. “The stigma against the Bronx and what we, as a borough, can contribute to this city ends with us.”

A major objective of the Bronx Blaqlist is to bring exposure to artistic talent and local businesses. “It’s integral that small businesses learn to embrace and cater to the creatives in their community, because most often they have great insight into what the neighborhood needs,” said Ruiz.

By exposure, she meant public events that feature homegrown talent. “The Blaqlist is a Bronx-born and bred initiative,” said Ruiz.

The artists involved represent different mediums and demographics.” The organization regularly hosts events in the borough. “Our showcase emphasizes the pillars of hip-hop,” she said. “We try to intertwine poets with the energy of the musical guests for the evening.”

Such events have included a monthly performance night at Port Morris Distillery, which features hip-hop artists, poets, and an open mic. Located in the South Bronx, Port Morris Distillery, the maker of Pitorro, a traditional Puerto Rican liquor, is an example of a business that recently chose to set up shop in the borough. Benefits run both ways; Bronx Blaqlist performers receive exposure at a popular nightclub, and Port Morris gains customers from the Blaqlist’s audience.

The Bronx Blaqlist’s reach has extended to the borough’s cultural institutions. The organization hosted in June 2017 the “All Ladies Revue,” which highlighted the women of street art in New York City, hosted at the Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance (BAAD). In September 2017 Ruiz and Rob Roman, a fellow Blaqlist member, performed at “Boogie on the Boulevard,” an all-ages event sponsored by the Bronx Museum of the Arts.





The Bronx Blaqlist has set an ambitious agenda. The organization hopes to establish B.Y.O.B., which is a book club and reading series where participants bring their own books to read aloud while on stage or in group discussions. Another planned event is Sole Train, a monthly dance that pays tribute to urban line dancing of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s while also encouraging participants to donate sneakers so aspiring dancers can get their start. The organization also plans more youth outreach to give the borough’s youngest content creators a platform to share their work.

“We hope to eventually become a cultural institution on par with the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, or even the New York Public Library,”
said Ruiz.

She would love to see the Bronx Blaqlist’s brand of culture, which bubbles up from the community, spread citywide. Ruiz foresees a time in the not-too-distant future when organizations with an aesthetic similar to the Bronx Blaqlist arise in Brooklyn and Queens, enabling inter-borough cross-connections. “The Blaqlist is looking to cater to New York City one neighborhood at a time,” she said.

“For years we have been dependent on Manhattan, and now Brooklyn, to meet our nightlife and interactive needs,” said Ruiz. “Now, we don’t.”

For more information on the Bronx Blaqlist, including information on its upcoming events and future initiatives, visit the following online resources:

thebxblaqlist.com
facebook.com/thebxblaqlist
Twitter/Instagram: thebxblaqlist