

In the South Bronx, The Arts Beckon

By SETH KUGEL

Every Thursday night, a slick restaurant called the G-Bar attracts a professional crowd with live jazz, lobster ravioli and valet parking. It's one block from a 900-seat concert hall, around the corner from a soon-to-open Spanish rock nightspot, just west of where a theater group is building a \$2 million performance space.

This is the South Bronx?

Drop the question mark. This is the South Bronx. The same place that suffers from a nasty reputation that gets nastier the farther away you get. New Yorkers and regular visitors might have heard about massive housing investments, new loft space for artists and sharply reduced crime. For others the old images are probably more entrenched: Fort Apache. Jimmy Carter comes to Charlotte Street. The Bronx is burning.

The South Bronx is still no paradise, as any housing project resident or child asthma sufferer will tell you. But on a recent evening wine glasses and Corona bottles clinked and ties were loosened at the G-Bar as patrons heard the jazz repertory of 22-year-old Jennifer Jade Ledesna, a Bronx native who sang

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a trilingual set of Afro-Cuban boleros, Brazilian bossa nova and American jazz standards. Ms. Ledesna, who is Dominican and Puerto Rican, sang from under her wild curls from the back of the warm-hued wooden dining area. She was accompanied by musicians who included the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra pianist Eric Lewis. The following week the two would perform at Chez Suzette in Midtown. But this night, the Bronx.



Photographs by Susan Farley for The New York Times
Jennifer Jade Ledesna at G-Bar
and Los Auténticos at Willie's.

