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## BRIO winner makes his mark through Wordz

by Shant Shahrigian

During a recent poetry night at An Beal Bocht Cafe on West 238th Street, Erik Maldonado, better known in the Bronx as The Advocate of Wordz, took the microphone.

His powerful enunciation and expressive body language quickly commanded the attention of the dimly lit room.

“New poem,” Mr. Maldonado tersely announced before launching into his performance of “4 Letters:”



Erik Maldonado, who performs as the Advocate of Wordz, at An Beal Bocht on Dec. 10.

Photo: Marisol Diaz/Riverdale Press

*I turn acorns to bombs and play wingman at the barber  
Make a motorbike out of bus seats and fly to lands that man don't bother  
Slip down slides too narrow for a 6' 1" body just for the smiles I barter  
All in the day's work of me hoping to become a better father...*

For the rest of the night at the cozy bar and restaurant, audience members came up to Mr. Maldonado's table to share their impressions while the artist himself gave encouragement to the other poets who performed, clapping his hands and snapping his fingers during lines he especially liked.

At 34, Mr. Maldonado is perhaps the most dedicated proponent of poetry in the borough. After cutting his teeth at venues like the Nuyorican Poets Cafe in Manhattan, the mixed-heritage poet has molded a career of tirelessly writing, performing and teaching — in other words, living up to the stage name he adopted about a decade ago.

“People said, ‘Oh, you're a poet.’ And I said, no, I'm more like an advocate of words,” he said. “That was instinctual and it felt right and that's why I've stuck with the moniker.”

Earlier this year, he received a Bronx Recognizes Its Own Award, or BRIO, for his 2012 book “Wordz ...A Book of Poetry and Other Creative Nonsense That is Imperative to Your Existence.” When not about the city or on the road performing his punchy poems, he encourages young people to give verse a chance at classrooms and forums like the [Bronx Youth Poetry Slam](#), which he hosted at the Kingsbridge Library in May.

He pitches poetry and rhetoric to students as a way to talk their way out of detention.