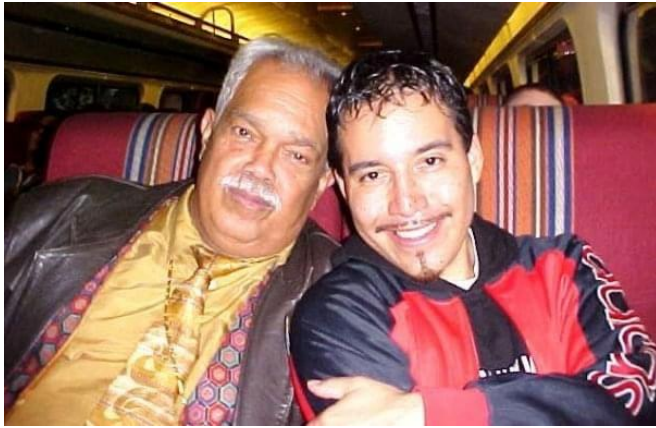


## Emanuel Xavier Tribute for Miguel Algarín



When asked to submit to this project, I was rather stumped because there is much I could share about Miguel. However, I think this Q&A excerpt with Charlie Vázquez from a recent interview (On Controversy, Looking Back, and The Selected Poems of Emanuel Xavier) published by Lambda Literary (June 14, 2021) sums it up. Charlie Vázquez: We lost the great Miguel Algarín last year. It was you who introduced me to him when you read at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe back in 2009 or so. Anything you'd like to share about him and the legacy he's left behind, his influence on your work?

Emanuel Xavier: The Nuyorican Poets Cafe was my first introduction to spoken word poetry and it continues to provide a safe space for many to step up to the mic and share their truths. Miguel heard any number of aspiring poets. This was his auditioning platform, so for him to approach anyone afterwards with a genuine compliment was profound. Real talent emerged from that venue thanks to him, and he provided legacy and inspiration.

He paid me the highest compliment from the very beginning and told me that I reminded him of Miguel Piñero. He probably said that to a lot of people, but I believed he meant it. I looked Piñero up and read his work, noting some of the correlations. Like Piñero, I had abandonment issues with my father which informed much of my early criminal behavior while out on the streets.

While Piñero's bisexuality was historically rumored, I came onto the scene unapologetically and openly gay. He was purebred Puerto Rican whereas I had an Ecuadorian mother and a questionable father, so I'm Nuyorican in that I'm a native New Yorker Latinx at best. I think it's inevitable that when you're starting out, people will compare you to those who came before, but it's important not to box yourself into those molds.

Miguel saw that I was at the forefront of change and bringing openly queer culture to the Nuyorican Poets Cafe with the House of Xavier and The Glam Slam. He appreciated that I had the balls to bring that to his venue and I'd like to think it helped him be more open and live his own truth. He gave so much to us as a community and yet his generation had to live in the shadows because of our prevailing cultural machismo for many years.

I know he loved me very much because I was so young and daring but I loved him just as much because he built us a legacy. Everybody who stepped foot into the Nuyorican Poets Cafe back in the day has a Miguel Algarín story because he's that kind of icon. To me, he will always be like the father I never had.

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Poet and activist, **Emanuel Xavier** was born in Brooklyn, New York, and became involved in the ball scene as a homeless gay teen. Xavier has been named an LGBTQ Icon by The Equality Forum. He was also presented a New York City Council Citation Award, an International Latino Book Award, a Gay City Impact Award and The Marsha A. Gomez Cultural Heritage Award. His new book Selected Poems of Emanuel Xavier is available now. [www.emanuelxavier.org](http://www.emanuelxavier.org)