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Vilcek Foundation awards \$50,000 prize to Filipina songwriter and producer Ruby Ibarra

The Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Music celebrates immigrant musicians' contributions to the arts, culture, and society.

NEW YORK, March 21, 2023—Songwriter and producer [Ruby Ibarra](#) receives the [Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Music](#) for her personal and powerful hip-hop and spoken-word performances that center her experiences as a Filipina American woman, and as an immigrant growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise is a \$50,000 prize awarded by the Vilcek Foundation as part of the Vilcek Foundation Prizes Program. The Vilcek Foundation prizes are awarded annually to immigrant artists and scientists whose work has had a profound impact on culture and society. The Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Music acknowledge artists at a pivotal point in their careers, and celebrate artists whose work demonstrates a unique insight or contribution to their genre.

“Hip-hop is an important part of the cultural and social history of the United States,” says Vilcek Foundation President Rick Kinsel. “As an evolution from blues, jazz, and rock music, it has served as a vital medium for social and political discourse and resistance over the past five decades.” He says, “Ruby Ibarra is an important and necessary voice in hip-hop, embracing the genre as a forum for discussion of immigration and gender in the United States.”

Born in Tacloban City in the Philippines, some of Ruby Ibarra’s earliest memories include seeing her family members sing, play guitar, and perform at local festivals. At the age of 5, Ibarra and her family immigrated to the United States, arriving at San Francisco International Airport in 1991. She describes that moment as a turning point in her young life, and a basis for her identity as an activist, artist, and musician.

As a youth, Ibarra loved to read and write, and found solace in expressing herself through language. Poetry was her first calling, and when she began hearing hip-hop music she was drawn to the genre’s combination of rhythm, lyricism, and syncopation to tell personal stories. [“This is a genre and a platform for the people who feel voiceless in society,”](#) she says. [“Being an immigrant, I gravitated towards that.”](#)

When she was in high school, Ibarra saved her lunch money for weeks to buy a dynamic microphone from RadioShack, so that she could begin making her own recordings at home using the family’s computer. She began performing at open mic events as an undergraduate student at the University of California, Davis, and joined and performed with the school’s spoken-word collective, SickSpits, while pursuing a degree in biochemistry.

Ibarra’s mixtape, *Lost in Translation*, was released in 2012, garnering airplay across major networks. In 2017, she released her debut album, *Circa91*, which explores themes of immigration, colorism, resilience, and misogyny. The album’s hit single, “Us,” struck a chord with Filipino and Pacific Islander audiences with its compelling hook, “Island women rise, walang makakatigil”—Tagalog for “nothing can stop us.”

In 2018, Ibarra co-founded the Pinays Rising Scholarship program with Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales. The program provides scholarships of \$500 to empower Filipina and Filipinx youth pursuing higher education. Since its establishment, Pinays Rising has awarded more than 30 scholarships each year to young students and activists.

“Hip-hop gives me a way to be able to document my existence and I think that’s what a lot of us want to do: to feel like we exist, to show people that our stories matter,” says Ibarra. “There’s humanity in our immigrant experiences, and I think that we can all find comfort in knowing that we’re not alone in this journey.”

Read more at the Vilcek Foundation: [*Ruby Ibarra: “Language is a form of survival”*](#)

The Vilcek Foundation

The Vilcek Foundation raises awareness of immigrant contributions in the United States and fosters appreciation for the arts and sciences. The foundation was established in 2000 by Jan and Marica Vilcek, immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The mission of the foundation was inspired by the couple’s respective careers in biomedical science and art history. Since 2000, the foundation has awarded over \$7million in prizes to foreign-born individuals and has supported organizations with over \$6 million in grants.

The Vilcek Foundation is a private operating foundation, a federally tax-exempt nonprofit organization under IRS Section 501(c)(3). To learn more, please visit vilcek.org.