



PROJECT UPDATE

ISSUE #91 • MAY, 2023 • GEORGE BABIAK, EDITOR

A WHOLE LOTTA PLAYMAKIN' GOIN' ON!

Man, we've been busy since October. First of all, **The 52nd Street Project** crossed another pandemic threshold by taking our first overnight trip with kids since Feb., 2020. 6 young people and a slew of volunteers went to **Bridgehampton, Long Island** to write scintillating scripts for *Whale of a Tale: Plays that Make a Splash*, which we presented Mar. 31-Apr. 2. Here's the recap:



1. Matthew Saldivar was a serious rock guitarist and **Jeremy Rische** a devoted Guitar Hero gamer in **Jason DeVoe's** *Clash of Guitars and the Agreement*. Emcee **Melanie Correa** declared a tie and the two had to become friends. **George Babiak** directed this electric play.



2. Jaelannie Rodriguez's play *Encourage* featured **Lynne Marie Rosenberg** as a food photographer and **Jake Pino** as a chef who dreamed of being a basketball player. **Ana Gonzalez-Soto** was the dramaturge in Bridgehampton and **Alex O'Daly** directed in the city.



3. In *The Race* by **Zion King Lamonge**, **Madeline DeFreece** and **Sergio Mauritz Ang** were the offspring of a cheetah and an eagle who had a lot of conflict to sort out. **Alex J. Gould** was the director.



4. Jennifer Mogbock and **Micah Stock** were *The Bad Witch and Little Maiki* in **Katherine Chauca's** spooky play that took place entirely in Italy. **Natalie Martin** directed.



5. Alex Templer and **Sahar Milani** were friends and housemates at odds in *Two Different People with Their Own Lives* by **Diana Abrajan**. **Vanessa Porras** was the dramaturge and **Rachel Lin** was the director.



6. Josiah Perez's *Lion and Bear Friend Problems*, starring **Daiva Deupree** and **Carl Hendrick Louis** was (you guessed it) about a lion and a bear with friend problems. **Michael Propster** directed.

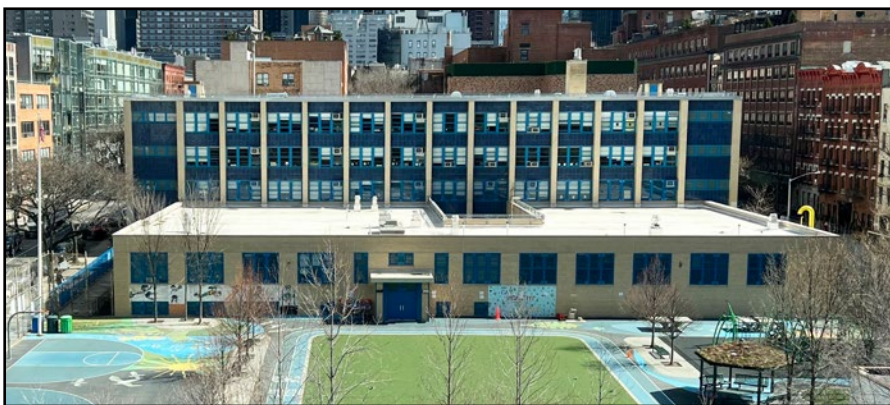
The support team on *Whale of a Tale* were **Julio Vaquero Ramos** as Composer/Music Director, **Greg MacPherson** as Lighting Designer, **Ally Thomas** on Costumes, **Doug Seldin** on Sound, and **Dara Silverman** as Stage Manager. Our stage crew were **Diego Caoili**, **Kylee Chester**, **Melanie Correa**, **Yovely Ramirez**, and **Evan Schultz**, while our livestream team were **Katie Bartz**, **Sarah Lopez**, and **Amirah Hancock**. The weekend-away hosts were **Alex Vassilaros**, **Cathy Dantchik**, and **Laurie Becker**. ♦

[CLICK ANY IMAGE TO SEE THAT PLAY ON OUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL OR HERE FOR THE WHOLE SHOW!](#)

PHOTOS BY DENEKA PENNISTON

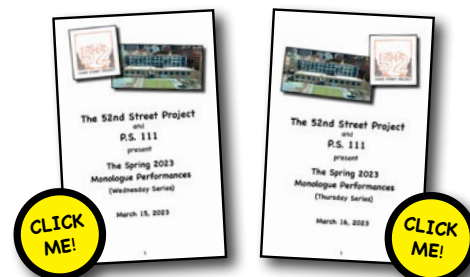
A NEW PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

See the building in this photo? That's **P.S. 111**, the public school that lies directly across 10th Avenue from our Clubhouse. It 's also the site of our newest initiative: Playmaking classes for the students as part of the school's curriculum! With the help of some of our friends, we taught two weekly classes and curated a pair of final performances featuring monologues written by the youngsters. The shows were performed in P.S. 111's auditorium, a first for us in the school where so many Project members of yore have gone.



Hell's Kitchen and P.S. 111 have recently had a large influx of Venezuelan families, so one of the classes was done entirely in Spanish. The shows were a mix of both English and Spanish, with full translations available in the printed programs.

The classes and shows were a rousing success and we're going back in May for new rounds with new kids. To read the monologues and see who helped with the shows and classes, just click on the program images at right. ♦



TEEN ENSEMBLE KEEPS BUSY

Bri Weintraub, our illustrious Production Manager, and **Kat Almirañez**, our intrepid Associate Artistic Director, recently arranged a special one-day upstate New York outing for our Teen Ensemble. The first stop was the **PRG Scene Shop**, a mammoth facility in New Windsor, NY that constructs large-scale sets and props for Broadway shows and national tours. **John Van Arsdale**, Director of Projects at PRG, gave us a wonderful tour of the shop buildings.

After some pizza we took a short drive over the Hudson to visit **Dia Beacon**, an old Nabisco box factory that was converted into a stellar modern art museum in 2003. Our teens had a great time in both places.

Not long after, the teens got tickets to *MJ the Musical*, the **Michael Jackson** extravaganza, which was built at PRG! This was made possible by the munificence of **Ray Harold**, one-time Project member and present-day Broadway union technician. Our members loved the show and Ray's talk about his ascent through the backstage world. ♦



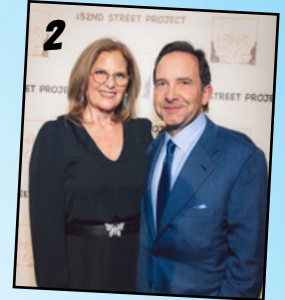
At PRG, standing: **Sarah Lopez, Melanie Correa, John Van Arsdale, Faith Villanueva, Aengus O'Donnell, George Babiak, Naseem Abdul-Majeed, Cassandra Sinchi, Amirah Hancock, Bri Weintraub.** Kneeling: **Mars Gleberman, Kat Almirañez, and Xavier Espinal.**



Can a big rock be art? You bet! The museum was so nice, they provided a guide, **Michele**, whom you can see left of the group.

JUST CHILLIN'! THE LIVE BENEFIT IS BACK!

The Project's last honest-to-gosh live gala was way back in 2019. This year, it was finally time to put away the flannel lounge pants, dress up in our best duds, and attend a real party. *Just Chillin'! A Very Cool Benefit for The 52nd Street Project*, was our very first Winter Gala, and everyone had a great time at **Capitale** on February 13 of 2023. The evening's guests of honor were long-time volunteers and good pals **Nancy Giles** and **Michael Potts**. In addition to the cocktails and a very nice dinner, the evening included many tributes to Nancy and Michael and songs culled from our **Songmaking** program last fall along with a new number penned by five Project members working in collaboration. ♦



Like any good gala, we had a photo op zone! The celebs above: 1. Actors **Becky** and **Dylan Baker**. 2. Project Board co-chairs **Cathy Dantchik** and **Louis Friedman**. 3. Director **Michael Mayer**, Broadway Stage Manager **Lisa Iacucci**, and actor **Camryn Manheim**. 4. Member/lyricists **Jai-Lyzz Rodriguez**, **Kylee Chester** and **Kassandra Sinchi**.

PHOTOS BY DENEKA PENISTON



Brooke Pendleton applauds **Rebecca Naomi Jones'** performance of her song *Pumpkin Spice*.



Nancy Giles and **Michael Potts** made very heartfelt speeches after hearing some very heartfelt tributes.



Logan Centeno really enjoyed **Jon-Michael Reese's** rendition of his song *New Favorite Pastry*.



Caelnne Arango-Ramirez introduces **Sahar Milani**, who performed Caelnne's song *Birthday Letter*.



Project Founder **Willie Reale** and actor (and former Proj member) **Shirley Rumierk** ran a lively auction that raised a few more bucks.



Mallory Portnoy and **Greg Hildreth** played Proj mascots **Fivey** and **Twoey** in a song called *Where Has the Time Gone?*

THESE SHOWS WERE OFF THE WALL!

On December 9-10, 2022, we presented 8 great new plays by 8 young playwrights in *Off The Wall: The Zany Plays*. They lived up to their name and can still be seen online. Just click on each picture or [HERE](#) for the whole show. ♦



José Luján wrote *Pineapple and Cupcake*, an epic tale about a rabbit DJ (**José Gamo**) and his human mom (**Precious Sipin**). **Kyle David** directed the wild journey.



It's hard to sit when you have no joints. **Omari Chancellor** and **Paton Ashbrook** were a pair of water bottles in **Emily Ponce's** *The Change*. It was directed by **Kaaron Briscoe**.



Krystal Lucas and **James Yaegashi** were a pair of scouts who learn how to turn into a fox and a tiger in **Khloe Castillo's** *Dream Come True*. Krystal was also the director.

PHOTOS BY WINSTON RODNEY



In *Snow Day*, written by **Angel Drew Welsh** and directed by **Jeremy Stoller**, **Grant Harrison** was a ping-pong-obsessed snow plow driver who runs into trouble with cafe maven **Elia Monte-Brown**.



In **Samaria Alkindi's** *Journey of the Death Potion*, Queen Flowerina (**Tina Chilip**) and King Kubabi the Cheetah (**Neil D'Astolfo**) have serious marital woes after a potion mix-up. **Monica LaBadia** directed.



The Witch's Cat, by **Bella Galindo**, told of a werewolf (**Noah Gaynor**) and a witch (**Morgan Everitt**) who are harassed by angry villagers. **Ciana Proto** was the director.



The Big Adventure of Timmy the T-Rex by **Mateo Santoni** was about a dinosaur (**Devin E. Haqq**) and his revenge against a cobra (**Kaileela Hobby**). **Kareem Lucas** helmed.



In **Chloe Torres'** poignant *Back to the Past* **KeiLyn Durrel Jones** was a time traveler who is befriended by 19th Century Scottish lass **Arielle Goldman**. **Dara Silverman** directed.

The production team for *Off The Wall* was **Avi A. Amon** as Composer/Music Director, **Katie Bartz** as Lighting Designer, **Madelene DeLeon** and **Michael Piatkowski** on Costumes, **Liz Stanton** on Sound, and **Mars Gleberman** as our Stage Manager. Our stage crew were **Alex Breton**, **Xavier Espinal**, **Julie Feenstra**, and **Betsy Hogg** while our livestream team were **Katie Bartz**, **Lauren Rae Vega**, and **Amari DuBose**.

FLYING SOLO...

In the Spring of 2023, six teen-age members of the Project took a 7-week class on the art of the monologue led by **Garrett Kim**. The pieces were presented on April 21 by the authors under the title *Flying Solo 2023*.

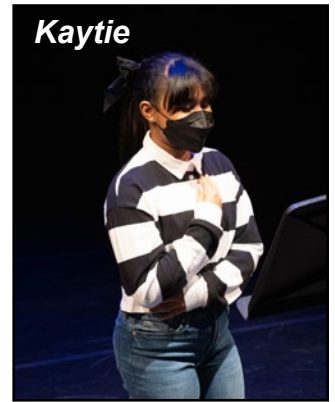
Ethan Cruz was a would-be YouTube singing star in *David Slays*, directed by **Nico Grelli**. **Loyal Jones** was a kid who got in trouble by getting too close to a friend named Curiosity in *Flashback*, directed by **Jason Alexander Wilks**. **Kaytie Gil** played a dual role in *Not Compatible*, which was all about a spat between friends. **Kendall Cafaro** directed.



Ethan

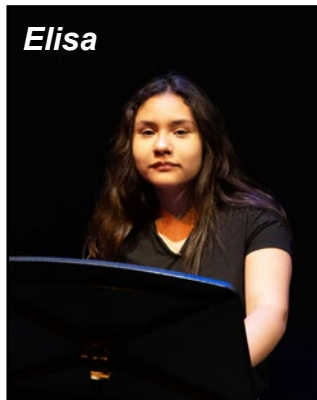


Loyal



Kaytie

Elisa Ramos' *Curiosity*, directed by **Joanna Parson**, was a poem set to music. **John Muca** gave us a taste of the pirate's life in *Stand Proud*, directed by **Grant Harrison**. Finally, **Jai-Lyzz Rodriguez** dared to take a day off from school in *Wait What... Huh?*, directed by **Jen Anaya**.



Elisa



John



Jai-Lyzz

We could go into more detail about the monologues, but why not see them yourself by clicking this [YouTube link right here?](#) ♦

PHOTOS BY WINSTON RODNEY

... AND ARTMAKING!

In April, four other members participated in an Artmaking workshop led by **Caylyn Wan-Creager** and **George Babiak** and assisted by ace vol **Lynne Marie Rosenberg**. The exhibit opened in the Five Angels lobby on the same night as *Flying Solo* and featured, among other creations, small homes built for personal objects. ♦



Jaelannie Rodriguez chose a 52nd Street Project mug and built a two-story townhouse for it to live in.



Rebeca Vanterpool fished a Hello Kitty keychain from her brother's bookbag and recreated the environment for the lucky talisman.



Oliver Tanner was inspired to design an artifact apartment for a red Uno Reverse card, complete with a thirsty pet zebra.



Ramsis Ramirez constructed a bed-like niche for a cherished cup made for him by his grandmother in the Dominican Republic.

THICK AS THIEVES: THE RELATIONSHIP PLAYS

In our Playback format, our members write a play for themselves to perform with an adult partner who also serves as the director. This year's edition was staged at **The Five Angels Theater** on Oct. 14 & 15, 2022. Don't be sorry if you missed it, because you can see it on **YouTube** by clicking each play individually or [THIS LINK](#) for the whole set ♦



Kendal Hartse, in the role of a boy named Jonah, needed to be convinced that girls could play soccer. **Hanna Brea** was just the girl who could do it in Hanna's *Broken Leg*. Best of all, they wound up being teammates.



In *Funky 48*, by **Andrew Moore**, Andrew and **Jonathan Dimas** were a couple of burger flippers who aspired to be rappers.



Alex Breton was a knight who killed a dragon AND a vampire (**Gardiner Comfort**) in his play *A Mortal Moral Dilemma*.



Olive Moayed and **Angel Desai** faced the end of days in Olive's *Money Definitely Positively 100 Percent Doesn't Buy Happiness*.



Peeps and Pulitzers, by **Lanai Blake-Soden**, told the tale of two journalists (**Jenelle Chu** and Lanai) who vie for literary glory.



Peter Muca's *Old Friends* was a darkly funny story of a bitter feud between a mafioso (**Charlie O'Rourke**) and a samurai (Peter)



In *The Truth About Dragons and Polar Bears* by **Adolfo Sinchi**, **Kyle Cameron** was a dragon tamer whose brother (Adolfo) was preparing to shame the family by becoming a polar bear tamer. In the end, they realized that all tamers are okay.

Thick as Thieves would not have been possible without **Kim Jinhyoung** as Composer/Music Director, **Bri Weintraub** as Lighting Designer, **Ana Gonzalez-Soto** on Costumes (she's all over this ish!), **Ally Thomas** on Sound, and **Gianna Shepard** as our Stage Manager. Our stage crew were **Katie Bartz**, **Diego Caoili**, **Magalis Fabian** and **Sarah Lopez**, while our livestream team were **Ella Lieberman**, **Eli Gutierrez**, and **Sarah Brownstein**.

THE SPORTS PAGE

Results of the First 52nd Street Project Ping-Pong Tournament since 2020 - March 17, 2023



The Champions

The Miami Vice Mob
Jayden Alvarado
and Jose Duran



2nd Place

Penguins on Vacay
Oliver Tanner
and Diego Caoili



3rd Place

Robbin' You
Xavier Espinal
and Ronald Peet



Wackiest Team

Otter Space
Hannah Santos
and Olivia AbiAssi



Most Improved

Jai-Lyzz Rodriguez
and Ramsis Ramirez



Best New Players

Yovely Ramirez
and Jojo Perez



Best Dressed

Killer Dolls
Caelnne Arango-Ramirez
and Ana Gonzalez-Soto



Good Sports

The Ups and Downs
Edgar Sinchi
and Michael Propster

PING-PONG PHOTOS BY THE PROJECT STAFF



Readers with keen memories may recall that our December Fundraiser mailer mentioned that we needed a new ping-pong table. Well, that drive worked so well that we bought a new table and named it Eleanor. Every game in the tournament was played on it!

SUBSCRIBE TO "THE PROJCAST!"

Did you know that we have a podcast that features the writing and voices of our young members? Well, we do!

Just click on the logo at right and start downloading these fascinating nuggets of information and entertainment! The most recent episode features John Sheehy's interviews with our newest Playmaking members (see Page 1)! ♦



MEGABITS • MEGABITS • MEGABITS



Ana Gonzalez-Soto, our office manager and Jill-of-all-trades, married her long-time beau **Ed Pritchard** on April 24. They threw a wonderful Hell's Kitchen party at **Giardino 54**, and everyone who attended had a blast.



Composer **Matt Schatz** and his wife **Jenna Hymes** had their second child **Millie** on February 25. Big sister **Harriet** appears to be happy about the new addition!



Our ace flyer artist pal **Patrick Jones** and his wife **Katie McGee** became parents to their little boy **Fergus** on February 8th, 2023. Maybe not so little! He was 10 lbs., 4 oz.



On November 12, 2022, **Jody Flader** and **Ben Loving** welcomed their daughter **Camille June Flader Loving** (usually called "Cam") into the world. Jody says Cam is "squishy, sweet, patient, and wise."



More second children! **Ruffin Prentiss III** and **Carra Patterson** (BOTH Project volunteers), gave birth to **Coretta Iman Prentiss** in Richmond, VA on Feb. 26. We're sure she'll be as cute as her older sister **Cressida**!



JEANNETTE BLACK

SEPTEMBER 8, 1918 – OCTOBER 10, 2022

One of the Project's longest-running and best friends is comedian and playwright **Lewis Black**. We were saddened to hear of the death of his mom, **Jeannette Black**, who passed away peacefully in her sleep in Owings Mills, Maryland last Fall at the age of 104. Jeannette had wanted to be a biologist but became a brilliant teacher who made sure that her students understood the practical applications of the sciences she taught. She also had a wicked sense of humor. Lew says of her: "She was a ferocious angel. When I perform you can hear her from time to time. Sarcasm was her sword." We end with a sample of Jeannette's wit: "Next time, I'll raise dogs. They are more loyal and more excited to see you." ♦


COMING UP ON OUR STAGE!

We're doing two brand-new shows in June of 2023! For more info and tix, click the pix to visit our reservation page.

THE 52ND STREET PROJECT PRESENTS

EYES OF THE STORM

THE 2023 TEEN ENSEMBLE SHOW

FRIDAY, JUNE 2 AT 7:30 PM  SATURDAY, JUNE 3 AT 3:00 PM

THE FIVE ANGELS THEATER
789 10TH AVE. BETWEEN 52ND AND 53RD ST.
FOR INFO AND RESERVATIONS, VISIT WWW.52PROJECT.ORG

ADMISSION FREE!

NATALIE HIRSCH, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
KAT ALMIRANÉZ, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
CAROL OCHS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ARTWORK BY JAVIEN ALVARADO

THE 52ND STREET PROJECT PRESENTS

BOOM!
WHAM!
POW!

ADMISSION FREE!

THE 2023 STAGE COMBAT SHOW
FRIDAY JUNE 16 - 7:30 PM
THE FIVE ANGELS THEATER
789 10TH AVE. BETWEEN 52ND AND 53RD
52PROJECT.ORG FOR INFO AND TICKETS

NATALIE HIRSCH, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
CAROL OCHS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
KAT ALMIRANÉZ, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
GARRETT KIM, STAGE COMBAT DIRECTOR

FLYER ART BY OLIVER TANNER



Hi, P.U. Readers! I'm Ahmed, and I manage this box nowadays! The following foundations, corporations, and government agencies recently made generous grants to The 52nd Street Project. We are grateful to them for their support as well as to the many individuals who help sustain the Project's programs. ♦

AllianceBernstein.....	\$2,315	Maxine and Irving Castle Foundation	\$5,000
Bank of America	\$1,000	Morgan Stanley.....	\$5,000
Bulls Head Foundation, Inc.	\$2,500	National Endowment for the Arts.....	\$30,000
Cantor Fitzgerald	\$50,000	NYC Department of Cultural Affairs.....	\$65,880
Community Foundation of Sarasota County	\$5,000	NYSOA	\$69,500
Frederick Loewe Foundation.....	\$10,000	Signature Bank	\$5,000
		Yorke Construction Corp.....	\$7,500

(Gifts received September 27, 2022 to April 27, 2023)



WANT TO DONATE TO THE 52ND STREET PROJECT?

It's as easy as 5 + 2!

Just click [HERE](#) to get to our donation page.



FLYER BAR PROFILE



DENEKA PENISTON

What she does for us- Deneka has been taking photos of our shows and benefits for many years. Some of her work is in this issue! Another interesting fact about Deneka: she was a kid in the very first 52nd Street Project group. In fact, she was the one who tugged at founder **Willie Reale's** sleeve and said "When's the next show?"

Occupation- Professional photographer

Why she does what she does- "Photography allows me to merge my appreciation for all things creative with my curiosity of the human condition."

Place of birth - "Newark, New Jersey. We moved to New York City when I was a couple of months old."

Habitat- "New York City."

Hobbies- "Bird watching, photography, trying new cuisines; preferably in new places."

Last books read- "*Why Didn't You Tell Me* by my friend Carmen Rita Wong and *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson."

Most recent accomplishment- "Having NPR Music publish some of my photography to commemorate International Jazz Day last year."

Best Project Memory- "This is hard, but I'll give the two that were the most impactful: Feeling the undeniable high of getting that first laugh on stage which prompted "the question" I asked Willie. And walking around that small French town during the Project's first trip abroad and sparking my wanderlust."

Credo- "Every day is a chance to turn it all around." - Ironically from the movie *Vanilla Sky*."

Advice to kids- "Find people who support and uplift you and reciprocate in kind. Continue discovering what brings you joy and make time to engage with it throughout your life."

Favorite thing about the Project- "The uncompromising support given to the kids even as they grow into adulthood."

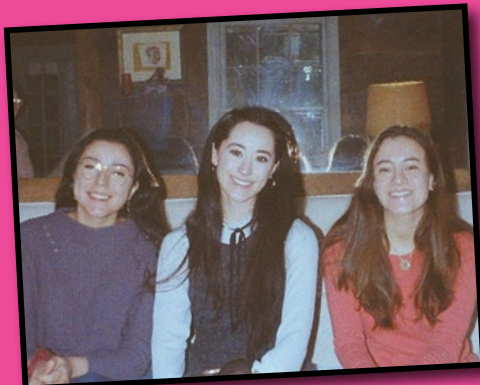
On Flyer Bars- "I've never had one, but I hear that they are yummy!" ♦

SNAPZ! SNAPSHOTS FROM LONG AGO (MARCH, '23)

Ana Gonzalez-Soto (find her in Megabits, on page 8) is a camera aficionado. For our first overnight trip since early 2020 (see p.1), she brought along her old-school film camera and took photos that recreated the look of the 70's. Check 'em out! ♦



The Southampton ice rink. The kids were grateful for the Skate Helpers.



Vanessa, Ana, and Caylyn on a break.



Carol and John NEVER take a break.



The playwrights line up for "Eggs-in-Holes."



Ready for the final readings!



Just one last hand! Pl-e-e-e-a-se!!!