If you haven’t heard the news on social media already, The 52nd Street Project presented two Playmaking shows this summer LIVE and IN-PERSON on our actual stage with a small, but real, audience. Yes, you read correctly: LIVE! This bold initiative began by bringing some lucky young people (all girls, by chance) into our space for Playmaking classes taught by Kat Almirañez and Garrett Kim. The nascent playwrights then wrote final plays for their happy actors which we did in two batches on August 13 and 20th. The shows, called Walking On Sunshine: The Radiant Plays (Steps 1 and 2), were also live-streamed on YouTube with no less than 4 cameras capturing the action. Best of all, you can still see the show by clicking THIS LINK!

Here’s the rundown of the first crop of four plays.

1. Evelyn Meyer’s The Friendship cast Greg Hildreth and Grace Fojtik as college students who get a second chance to perform a play about a spider in their college theater class. Kaaron Briscoe did double-duty as dramaturge and director.

2. Vanessa Porras and José Duran were lemonade entrepreneurs going through a friendship crisis in Caring, by Payton Jones. Sophia Zukoski and Caylyn Wan-Creager dramaturged, while Alexandra O’Daly directed the play (which had over 50 props!).

3. The Forest, by Elisa Ramos, was about a tree-loving French woman (Arielle Goldman) and her friendship (French-ship?) with an ambitious ice cream salesman (Korey Jackson). Grace Fojtik dramaturged and Michael Propster directed.

4. Alex J. Gould and Madeline DeFreece were the title characters in The Dancing Lions, written by Gloria Sanchez and dramaturged and directed by Molly Carden. There was quite a bit of line dancing... er, LION dancing. ✨
On Friday, Aug. 20, just one week after Step 1, we presented three more plays by three MORE young playwrights in Walking on Sunshine, Step 2.

1. Pass The Mic, by Brooke Pendleton, was about a brother and sister (José-Maria Aquila and Sarah Quigley) who get jobs at the same radio station. Kristina Nungaray dramaturged while Helen Cespedes directed.

2. Rebeca Vanterpool’s The Incident showed what life is like when you are a burrito (Olivia Gilliatt) or a green axolotl (Marchant Davis) Elli Stovall Brown was the dramaturge, Kerry Warren directed. An axolotl, by the way, is a kind of salamander native to Mexico that looks like it is smiling.

3. The Best Day In My Life, by Valerie Lugo-Rodriguez, was about two tomboys (Kate Abbruzzese and Angelica Toledo) who iron out a lot of differences. Ana Gonzalez Soto dramaturged and Monica Labadia directed.

Both of these Playmaking shows, the first non-virtual programming since January of 2020, were a rousing success for the audience, the playwrights, the performers, AND the tech team. Here’s who helped us out behind the scenes:

WALKING ON SUNSHINE: THE RADIANT PLAYS
THE DESIGN AND TECH TEAM

Margaret Gleberman ...................... Stage Manager
Avi A. Amon ........................... Composer/Maestro, Step 1
Emily Gardner Xu Hall ........... Composer/Maestro, Step 2
Greg MacPherson ...................... Lighting Designer, Step 1
Jade Barnett-Irons ...................... Lighting Designer, Step 2
Michael Piatkowski ................... Costumes, Step 1
Jennifer Jones ......................... Costumes, Step 2
Valentina Primrose ..................... Costume Asst., Step 2
Alicia Moeller .......................... Sound, Step 1
John Sheehy ............................. Sound, Step 2
Evan Schultz, Ana Soto, Alex Torres ................. Crew
Ahmed Attia ............................... Camera
Enrique Caballero ....................... Camera, Step 1
Sofia Santoni ........................... Camera, Step 2
George Babiak ......................... Props, Slides, Video direction

Click here to see the show on our YouTube channel!
Michael Piatkowski has nearly 60 years of experience in the New York theater as a director, designer, producer, writer and many other things. He has been one of our volunteer costume designers since our Teen Ensemble’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in 2015. All our designers work extremely hard, but Michael goes the extra mile by creating full-color character renderings for the shows he does for us. Sadly, few get to see these lovely paintings. Time to change that! Here are Michael’s paintings for *Walking on Sunshine, Step 1*. You can see the final results on page 1 of this newsletter. We think he did a good job of realizing his visions.

**Awards for Avi and Emily**

Are our composers talented, or what? Both Avi A. Amon and Emily Gardner Xu Hall (the composers of *Walking on Sunshine*) have been honored with awards from The Dramatists Guild Foundation.

Avi, the Project’s resident Music Director, got the Thom Thomas Award and Emily, a relatively new volunteer with us, received the Stephen Schwartz Award For Musical Theater. The awards honor playwrights, composers, lyricists, and librettists who show promise in their writing and each come with a $10,000 prize. Congratulations, you two!

**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 above logo and start downloading these fascinating nuggets of information and entertainment!
This past May, we held Hidden Gems, our second virtual benefit. The event, spanning two weeks, started on May 3 with an array of original on-line music videos created by the Songmakers of the Project and a passel of great performers. The improvement over 2020’s benefit was that this one ended on May 17 with an actual performance live-streamed from the Power Station at the NYC Berklee School of Music, less than half a block from the Five Angels Theater.

The live event was hosted by the great Nancy Giles and featured two show-stopping songs written by a pair of Project members. We raised $261,454 (approximately).

You can still see the whole shebang by clicking THE HIDDEN GEMS WEBSITE.

Scenes From A Golf Outing

On May 20, A scant three days after the benefit above, we trundled out to the Quaker Ridge Golf Club in Scarsdale for the Project’s Annual Golf Outing. Sure, lots of people played golf, but what we were really there to do was raise a little more money for The Project. Fortunately, it was a beautiful day for both golfing and fundraising and we succeeded in both.

Quaker Ridge is considered by some to be one of the top 100 courses in the world.

Proj actors team Billy Crudup, John Ellison Conlee, and David Costabile met their Waterloo (Waterloo sparkling water, that is).

Staffers Kristina Nungaray, Ahmed Attia, and Carol Ochs remained vigilant at the polo shirt table.

Isn’t it strange that golf courses often have these barren and neglected patches amidst all the lush greenery?
Welcome, Bri Weintraub!

If you’ve been reading this newsletter carefully, you’ll know that we’ve been stepping up live production of our shows. Also, with the return of Broadway and other theater, we’ve been renting to outside companies who need rehearsal space. At press time, the national touring company of Pretty Woman was in the Five Angels Theater and were to be followed by Broadway’s Jagged Little Pill. (Historical note: Hamilton was first workshoped in our space before opening at the Public Theater).

With the increase in activity, we realized we really need a Production Manager, so we have hired Brianna Weintraub, better known as “Bri” (it rhymes with “glee”). Bri has been working in theater since she was in 2nd grade. She completed her MFA in Technical Production in spring of 2020 and has been working as the Production Manager and Lighting Supervisor at Sarah Lawrence College. Prior to moving to New York, Bri worked in dance, concert production, events, and theatre, and is excited to come back to her ultimate goal of creating theatre while working with young people.

Hi, P.U. Readers! I’m Ahmed, and I’m in charge of this box now! 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.

- Seller-Lehrer Family Foundation ................................................................. $50,000
- The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation ........................................................ $30,000
- The Shubert Foundation ........................................................................... $20,000
- Consolidated Edison .................................................................................. $10,000
- Tiger Baron Foundation ............................................................................. $5,000
- Signature Bank .......................................................................................... $5,000
- The Henlopen Foundation .......................................................................... $5,000
- Carol M. & Stephen E. Canter Family Foundation ................................. $5,000

(Gifts received April 6, 2021 – September 21, 2021)

Want To Donate To The 52nd Street Project?
It’s as easy as 5 + 2!
Just visit www.52project.org and click the “You Can Help” box.

Project Update 5 October 2021
Nice Turnout for the Scholarship Party

On August 3rd, we held our annual Scholarship Party in the P.S. 111 schoolyard right across the street. It’s one of our most beloved events, since we get to say hello to some grown-up old friends AND we get to give them some money to help cover their college expenses. There were 29 recipients this year. Here’s who came to pick up their checks in person and enjoy a cupcake and some Waterloo sparkling water.

“Jaiva” the duo more commonly known as Jayleen Velez and Daiva Deupree.

Here are Rebecca Gomez and Josh Gomez with their mom in between them.

They’re not in college, but staffer Caylyn and her mom Tracy had a good time anyway.

Sibling Pals! Arianna Casiano came with her big bro Joseph Cruz.

Associate Artistic Director Kat Almiranez and Karen Tineo got to reconnect.

More sibling pals! Chyanne Peña and Chayse Peña.

Wilhelmina Ohene Kari-Kari always has a warm smile when she’s around the Project.

Music and film auteurs Faisal Afridi and Enrique Caballero.

Here’s Kat again, with Beyoncé Thomas, our summer receptionist (still in high school).

Artistic Director Natalie Hirsch and Education Director Johanna Vidal presided.

Karin Schall blessed the group with an original sidewalk chalk inscription.

And Board Co-chair Louis Friedman truly enjoys handing out the checks.
To our surprise, member/vol Jed Clarke and Alena had a baby named Keziah over a year ago on July 12. Many famous people were born on that date, including Julius Caesar, Milton Berle, and George Babiak.

Vol Charlie O’Rourke and his wife Annie have a baby! Jack O’Rourke arrived on July 8 at Mt. Sinai West (just down the street from us). Grandpa Kevin O’Rourke (a long-time actor volunteer) is also excited about Jack.

Over the years, Craig Cox and his brother Jeff have written a number of hilarious Project plays. On July 28th, Craig and his girlfriend Raven Hardison brought Ellis Abeo Cox into the world.

Actor/writer Dylan Dawson is a dad, too! He and vol Heather Robb (they had a wonderful pandemic wedding) had Lowen Robb Dawson on Sept. 10 in Pasadena, CA.

Shane West was an intern with us a while back. He and Anna-Kaye West just had their third child, Koryn, seen here entertaining her two older brothers.

Actor/writer Dylan Dawson is a dad, too! He and vol Heather Robb (they had a wonderful pandemic wedding) had Lowen Robb Dawson on Sept. 10 in Pasadena, CA.

It's raining babies at the Cooper's!

Project alum and Broadway star Lilli Cooper and Paul McLoughlin gave birth to Bodie Cooper McLoughlin on September 7. Here are Paul and Lilli with Bodie and Lilli's folks Chuck Cooper (also a Broadway star) and Tisa Farley.

Not to be outdone, on Sept. 19, Lilli's brother Alex Cooper and his wife Michelle produced Sir Quinton Charles Cooper who will be known as Quinn.

Julia Lawler, another one of our old-time interns, and their partner Austin Blanch welcomed Lucy Lawler Blanch on July 14th, 2021. Lucy was born in Minneapolis.

Over the years, Craig Cox and his brother Jeff have written a number of hilarious Project plays. On July 28th, Craig and his girlfriend Raven Hardison brought Ellis Abeo Cox into the world.

It's raining babies at the Cooper's!

Project alum and Broadway star Lilli Cooper and Paul McLoughlin gave birth to Bodie Cooper McLoughlin on September 7. Here are Paul and Lilli with Bodie and Lilli's folks Chuck Cooper (also a Broadway star) and Tisa Farley.

Not to be outdone, on Sept. 19, Lilli's brother Alex Cooper and his wife Michelle produced Sir Quinton Charles Cooper who will be known as Quinn.
Our good friend and veteran volunteer Daiva Deupree is opening a bar! It's called Lucky Betty's and is located in Camden, Maine. By the time you read this, it will be open for business, so put down this newsletter and head up to Camden right now, 'cause it's bound to be a swell hang-out. Good luck, Daiva and Betty!

Kristina Nungaray is our Marketing and Events Manager. We knew she was very athletic when she signed on, but she has definitely stepped it up during the pandemic. Last year, she ran her first marathon. Then, on Sept. 11, she and her training partner Jules Bursee competed in the Hartford Women's Triathlon in Farmington, CT. What is impressive is that Kristina learned how to ride a bike the morning of the race! Jules had only learned to swim a few weeks before. The Triathlon went so well that Kristina has registered for 5 more next year!

Coming Shows - Click the images for info and reservations!
What she does for us- Jenni Swan's first service to us was as a stage manager in 2005. She did not SM again until 2018, but then racked up seven more shows in rapid succession. She has also been on our Big Kids Fundraising Committee and is a dedicated donor and audience member.

Occupation- Executive Assistant

Why she does what she does- "Just a geek for details and logistics, and helping others."

Hobbies- “Theater, travel, reading, writing.”

Last book read- “Radium Girls by Kate Moore.”

Most recent accomplishment- “I rediscovered the New York Public Library and have read a dozen books in the last few weeks.”

Best Project Memory- “My first show with them as an SM was back in Oct 2005. I was absolutely in awe of this wonderful group of people and the work they do, and although it took me several years to work on another show, I always knew I would return.”

Credo- “As of the pandemic, ‘We’ll see.’”

Advice to kids- “Let yourself fully embrace what you love and enjoy. Who cares if someone else doesn’t think it’s cool? You do!”

Place of birth- “Milwaukee, Wisconsin.”

Habitat- “The forests and mountain hiking trails of New Zealand.”

Favorite thing about the Project- “THE PEOPLE. No question.”

On Flyer Bars- “They are magically delicious and should be consumed liberally. But not in the theater, only in the lobby and outside.”

As we were putting this newsletter together in September of 2021, we welcomed a new Artmaking group into the Clubhouse. 5 young members (Adolfo, Doris, Faith, Sophia, Xavier) and 1 teen counselor (Melanie) sat at nicely distanced tables and began the six-week class by writing haikus and creating visual art that expressed the meaning of the written words. Staff members Caylyn Wan-Creager and George Babiak are running the course. ✦