

# PROJECT UPDATE

VOLUME 6 APRIL 1991

**Move over Peter Cottontail and take those matzoh balls with you - spring can't officially bloom without you:**

## UPDATE

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## *Peter Pan*

"Okay everybody, here we go!!!" And there we went - seven Project kids and three escorting adults went into the Lunt-Fontanne and entered Never Never Land. Through the generosity of Stephen Graham - Eli Barbosa, Jessica Soto, Wendell Borrero, Eric Santoni, Samona Squire, Kulondi Frier and Shirley Rumierk, with adults (and we use this term loosely), Jenny Gersten, Cecilia Arana and Mina Hammer got to fly away with Peter Pan and his cohorts on January 17th. The production was stupendous - featuring huge sets, bright costumes and a wonderful performance by Cathy Rigby. After the show, through our friend Neil Mazzella at Hudson Scenic, we got a backstage tour. Upon hearing later that we had missed seeing her at the stage door, Cathy Rigby sent photos and flyers addressed personally to each child. We thank her for her great performance and her generosity to seven kids who will probably never forget their trip to Never Never Land.

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## *Workshop*

For the weekend of January 25th - 27th, a group of 14 adult volunteers attended a workshop with Playmaking Director, Daniel Judah Sklar, at the upstate New York home of Barbara Ettinger. Through the course of the two days, Daniel took each adult through the same process he takes the children during their eight weeks of classes. What was most important about the weekend was the training of a group of adults in Daniel's Playmaking methods so that they can now be called upon to teach kids in other places. Amazing works were produced by the end of the workshop - testaments to Daniel's technique. Not only were the adults impressed with themselves, but they also had a new found respect for each kid who has written a play. To complete their "training" most of these adults have observed Daniel's courses, read his book, and have directly participated in one or more Playmaking productions as a director/dramaturg and/or as an actor.

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## *A Peace of My Mind*

On March 22nd, 23rd and 24th, the Project presented five performances of "A Peace of My Mind". Janet Zarish was at the helm as the Guest Artistic Director, and with the help of Playmaking Director, Daniel Judah Sklar and six other director/dramaturgs, Greg Grove, Kay Matschullat, Paul McCrane, Meredith Portman, Byam Stevens and Judy Tate led seven new writers into "A Peace of My Mind". Gabriel Garcia, Kristy Lopez, Olaniyi Makinde, Evelyn Maldonado, Joanne Ramirez, Luis Santoni and Eddie Zambrano shared their talent and imaginations by giving us such wonderful characters as a banana who wants to be a human being; Janal, the man who didn't like Cheerios and whose wife didn't like him; a greedy Martian; a famous builder of Poster Houses; a clown who was born that way; a boy, a drug and his angel; and a couple trying to fall in love despite all odds. New and old friends joined our acting company, and with the able help of an incredible backstage crew, brought all of these characters to life. The audiences cheered and fun was had by all. "A Peace of My Mind" is over, quiet is back in the office and the troops are sort of out of the gulf, so let's hope for at least a modicum of peace in the world.



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*A Peace of My  
Mind Playwrights  
and Dramaturg/  
Directors at Rest*  
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## *Replay*

Since late February, 15 kids (from both HumanNature and The Dream Theme) have been attending weekly Replay classes. Daniel has devised a new course to take kids the next step in playwriting. He has declared that these particular groups are among the best he's had! All the kids are writing plays in class. Then on April 26th, we will pack them all up into big vans and trundle off to the Forest Inn in Tannersville. While there - in between horseback riding and nature hikes - professional actors will read the plays aloud. It's a new concept for the Project - a weekend "artistic" retreat - and we are all looking forward to it.

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## **Kids in the Spotlight**

Alex Bess recently appeared in an episode of "Law & Order" as an accidental victim of a violent crime. Alex spent most of the episode recovering in a hospital bed while his character spurred on the show's action. Ironically, the bad guy who orchestrated Alex's "accident" was Project artist volunteer, James McDaniel. Jim - how could you???

He's not really a kid, but he is sort of. . .anyway, Project volunteer, Lewis Black got a part in a TV pilot. This we feel will set the work of the Project back several years. We try so hard to impress the "work = success" formula on the children. Now they will see Lew, whom they know to be from the "let's play now and wing it later" school of acting, starring on national television. Back to the drawing board.

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## **Gone But Not Forgotten**

Since I was once one, I know that interns are the unsung heroes of the New York theatre. At The 52nd Street Project, interns do not get lost in the administrative shuffle - due to the impossibility of losing anything in an office this size, particularly anything that is too big to be dragged off by the mice. The first few months of 1991, we were lucky enough to have two interns - Jenny Gersten and Karen Schreiner! Jenny, only with us for January, helped in our replication process by proofing many volumes of scripts. Karen - here on a longer stay - threw herself to the lions of our creative drama classes. She also came away on the Playmaking weekend, helped with the March 18th screening and kid wrangled for the "Peace of My Mind" shows. They are back at their respective schools - Oberlin and Kalamazoo College - but their winning ways live on in our and the kids' hearts and minds.

- Mina Hammer

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## **Documentary Screening**

On Monday, March 18th, we screened Lyn Greene's and Josephine Dumas' "Three Minutes From Broadway: The Story of The 52nd Street Project" at the Alliance Francaise to a group of loyal Project followers who braved the rain and cold. Several people brought home baked goodies which we all enjoyed after both the 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. screenings. The ulterior motive was to sign up people to serve on our June Benefit Committee - we are happy to report quite a few people obliged!

For those of you living in L.A., or for those who plan to be passing through, the documentary has been chosen by the A.F.I.-Los Angeles Film Festival for screening on Saturday, April 20th at 2:15 p.m. and again on Tuesday, April 23rd at 7:00 p.m. both at the Monica Theaters in Santa Monica. Director, Lyn Greene, will be at the April 23rd screening and hopes to see all you Angelinos there.

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## **Project Flash!**

We just heard that W.N.E.T., Channel 13, will be broadcasting the documentary on Friday, June 21st at 10:30 p.m. and again on Saturday, June 22nd at 5:30 a.m. Set those V.C.R.'S now!

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## **A.A.T.E.**

We are getting a lot of mileage out of the documentary. Not only do we send it to prospective funders, we recently had the opportunity to show it at the American Alliance for Theatre and Education's Regional Conference at the Henry Street Settlement on Saturday, March 16th. Joining Willie and Mina were Project kid, Annette Myrie, and artist volunteer, Henry Krieger, who helped Willie re-create his 1989 One-on-One play, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf". Willie then spoke about the Project, taking the opportunity to also include some of his favorite menu items. The Project was able to sign up some new audience members, as well as to generate interest among some of the attendees in starting a Project in their communities.

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## **Our Readers Write**

Shirley Rumierk, age 13:

"Thank you for helping me have such a fun year  
Without the Project there's nothing to cheer  
Family Stories, Tannersville, I had a great time  
Gee, I wish I knew better words to rhyme  
But seriously, you guys are the greatest  
You took me out on the town till after ninish  
So I wish you the best for a prosperous year  
For now you are ten and soon twenty will be near"

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## **Ten Will Get You Twenty**

And thank you, Shirley, for giving us the perfect segue to update our readers on our 10th Anniversary Musical Retrospective. Keep Monday, June 3rd, open for that is the date for "Ten Will Get You Twenty: The 52nd Street Project's 10th Anniversary Musical Retrospective". What promises to be a surprise-filled evening, the production is shaping up to be one of the Project's best. We are still recruiting people to serve on a committee to help sell \$50 and \$100 tickets\* to the show that will be the centerpiece of a fundraising gala. If you are interested in volunteering - for the Committee, or to help in any way, please call us at (212) 245-1350. \*As always, there will be free seats available as well.



## Tid Bits

☛ The Replication process is proceeding. We are looking for a paper company to donate a lot of recycled paper. If you have any leads - please give us a call!

☛ Even though our creative drama teacher, Karen Schreiner, has shuffled off to Kalanazoo, Cecilia Arana continues to come in every Thursday from 3:45 to 4:30 to teach the drama club. We are sure she would love your help. Give us a call!

✱ PlayBack is still on! Most recently, Jessica Soto with Leigh Curran and Karen Myrie with Roma Maffia spent a weekend at Barbara Ettingers upstate.

✱ The undaunted "52 Comes Through" TheatreSports team is gearing up for yet another all-city tournament on Saturday, April 20th. Look for further details in the mail. Come and root them on!

✱ A thousand cheers to Project artist volunteer Kathy Bates. Hip, hip. . .



## Fundraising Corner

Thank you to:

Morgan Stanley: \$ 3,000  
Robert Bowne Foundation: \$ 5,000

And to all of the individuals who have donated a total of \$7,581.41 since the first of the year!



## Prelude To A Kiss

Through the kindness of producer, Kip Gould, and Project artist volunteer, Tracy Thorne, ten tickets to Craig Lucas' (yes, another Project volunteer) "Prelude To A Kiss" were offered to seven kids and their three chaperones in mid-February. The play was the perfect antidote to the February blues. A special treat was the post-performance talk with Prelude star, and yes, Project artist volunteer, John Dossett, on the set. Thank you all!



## Replication

Accolades to Project artist volunteers, Laura Maria Censabella and Sybil Rosen who have been forging ahead and using the Project as a model for programs on Long Island and in upstate New York. We are also looking forward to a continued relationship with Graham Windham through the efforts of Project volunteer, June Ballinger and Playmaking Director, Daniel Judah Sklar. Hopefully, they will be leading a program this summer in south Westchester county. And another Project volunteer, Leigh Curran, is planning to start The 52nd Street Project-West in Los Angeles this summer. Anyone who would like to become involved with any of these Project offshoots, please let us know! And we will be sure to keep you updated!



## The Kids' Corner

Hi. Willie, Mina and Marsue didn't have a great, wonderful or exciting Easter (they spent it together) so they told me (really made me) write this column.

For my Easter vacation I went to Washington for four days (with Josephine Dumas). It was great. The cherry blossoms were out, and what a beautiful sight it was. All of you should have been there. You would of had a great time. While I was there I went to the Capitol, Shakespeare's Library, the White House, Folger Theatre and the Air and Space Museum. The Air and Space Museum was incredible. There were planes older than Willie and the museum had shuttles and rockets. I had such an educational and terrific time. On my next vacation I would like to spend a whole week of fun.

This is Jessica Soto telling you for your next vacation go to Washington, and another thing - Barbara isn't as old as you think she is. She is one year younger than George.



## A Few Words From a Useless Appendage



Cathy Rigby sent some autographed photos over. Nyita took one look and asked, "Is that Tina Turner?" I'm sure they're often mistaken for one another. Nyita often calls me Charles because I remind her so much of Charles Barkley of the Philadelphia 76er's. With regard to identity, I feel I need to clarify for the readers what the duties of a useless appendage are.

- 1) Prepare rich, high cholesterol meals for all weekend trips.
- 2) Think of ways to amuse the funders.
- 3) Think of ways to amuse the children.
- 4) Think of ways to amuse myself.
- 5) Slough all the boring work off on Marsue and Mina.
- 6) Argue with Marsue about whether or not children can develop a taste for radicchio.
- 7) Be sure to be well rested in case of an emergency.
- 8) Take all the credit.
- 9) Discuss previous accomplishments.
- 10) Write this column.