

# PROJECT UPDATE

VOLUME 14 OCTOBER 1993

## THE SUMMER'S BLASTS

"Blast From The Past" marked the lucky seventh annual summer of One-on-Ones, and a blast it was indeed. All told, we left New York City with 24 young people, aged 8 to 15, and 24 adult playwrights and actors, and we returned with twenty wonderful plays (and the kids, too).

July 10th - 17th we went to Tyler Hill, Pennsylvania where we spent an exquisite week. We were hosted by our friends Mike Sell and Eric Karpeles, who rallied up the entire Northeastern Pennsylvania community as host families for the kids and adults, barbecue chefs, and aerial photograph pilots. We ate and ate and ate all this yummy stuff that was mostly donated by the noble folks at the Fairway Market ("it's like no other market"), and went horse-back riding, hula hooping, water-sliding, and swimming in the Delaware River, and thanks to Mary Kane and her cousin Jerry Durkin, we went to a minor league baseball game of the Scranton-Wilkesbarre Red Barons (they won!). Oh, and the plays! We had plays that ranged in time from the stone age, in which Raymond Harold and Fran McDormand discovered vowels, to 8 year-old Evelyn Maldonado's Disco Diva (written by Robert Shaffron), to Jeffrey Zambrano as the slave to the Greek god of little pieces of lint, to Elisa Mohamed's girl from Queens who wants to leave her life as a burger flipper at White Castle to marry Paul McCartney (written by Bill Wrubel of *PU*'s blasphemous past). These and other fine characters from history irreverently revisited graced the stages of Mike and Eric's lawn and the Ensemble Studio Theatre for four performances.

And before we had a chance to sing a verse of "Thanks for the Memories," we were off to Block Island with a new group from August 15th - 22nd. We were hosted by four families, Joya Verde, Virginia Dare, and Dr. Cristina Biaggi, whose house, "The Sea Change," has served as BI HQ for 5 years. Ten kids and ten adult actors and playwrights spent a week at the beach, on a boat ride in Johnny Vassilaros' speed boat, and playing bingo at the local fire-house — Cordell Horsford and Freddy Matos won

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## TUBA GOOD TUBA TRUE

Not to blow my own horn, but this summer I played tuba, Tuba City, that is. Michaela Murphy (Project volunteer extraordinaire and Playmaking teacher at large) and I took to the road and headed for Tuba City, Arizona, smack dab in the center of the Navajo Nation at the edge of the painted desert where we inaugurated the latest replication effort. In one whirlwind week ten teachers and eleven kids ages fifteen to seventeen were whisked through the Playmaking program, which culminated in a reading of the plays that was almost as hot as the desert sands themselves.

As the week went on we became an ever-increasing horde, Max "living legend" Wilk joined us on Tuesday and repeatedly told the kids to speak up as well as telling the staff some jokes almost as old as the hills around us. Playwright Willy Holtzman generously donated his time, and his cool four by four for excellent off-roading. On Friday our numbers truly swelled when Project heroes Willie (thanks to his brother Paul for his donation of frequent flyer miles), Jim McDaniel, and Pam Tyson popped by to serve as dramaturges to the young playwrights as well as actors for the readings. Our new best friend,

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Bertilda Luther, one of the Playmaking students in Tuba City, AZ, drew her own rendition of the Project logo, replacing Shel Silverstein's city buildings with traditional Navajo hogons.



## FALL LINE-UP 1993

So, the kids are finally going back to school. You're putting away the old barbecue grill. Soon the leaves will be turning brown, red and various other hues. This could only mean one thing. Well, two things actually. Fall is upon us and the 52nd Street Project is gearing up for another splendorific season.

First up on the schedule? **PIVOTAL ROLES**, The Playback Performances. In this series seven kids will go away with seven adults for an asbestos-free weekend and while there, both kid and adult write a play. To better explain the concept here is a quote from artistic director, Willie Reale: "Pivotal Roles" is perhaps the most convoluted, ill-conceived theme in the history of the Project. A child writes a play for his or herself and his or her adult partner. The adult then writes a play back for the child which has in common with the child's play one character. That character is either the adult character from the first play as a child or the child character from the first play as an adult." For a free diagram please send a SASE to: Project BrainTease, 220 West 42nd Street, 18th Floor. New York, NY 10036. The weekend away will take place in Wareham, Massachusetts at the home of Peter and Helen Randolph (Christopher's cooking!) from October 8-11. Writing and performing in this round are such seasoned Project kids as Jill Barbosa, Alex Bess, Mike Lugo, Lori Quinones, Joanne Ramirez and Tina Vamvoukakis and Project adult volunteers Francis Coppola, Peter Jay Fernandez, Bruce MacVittie, Cassandra Medley, James Ryan, and Gina Torres. "Pivotal Roles" will be performed at the New York Theatre Workshop on October 30th and 31st and on November 1st. For more information and reservations, call our reservation line at 642-8444.

Then in November we have the **REPLAY** Performances. This series features numerous kids doing numerous things with numerous results. Perhaps I should elaborate. The plays were written by youngsters who participated in last spring's Replay class, offered to the graduates of Playmaking, and their final work was read at the spring picnic. This fall these very plays will be performed by the kids, with sets designed by the kids as guided by Project designer Kevin Joseph Roach, and co-directed by a kid and an adult. Formerly entitled Triple Threat this batch will feature plays by Amy Barbosa, Darthula Harvey, Elisa Mohamed, Joseph Jackson, Jennifer Soccaras and Jeffrey Zambrano. The Replay Ensemble performance will be on Thursday, November 11th at the home of our old pals New Dramatists. You go, kids!

And to round out 1993 we will present our ever-popular **PLAYMAKING** program. We are all quite psyched about this year's Playmaking class as it will feature a plethora of miniature neophytes. Four of the members of the class are from Hartley House, a neighborhood community center, and four are from Rheedlen Place, a local social-service center that we hooked up with last spring. It'll be "NEWFACEMANIA!!!"

Big hellos to new associates Mike Arsham and Ken Terrell from Rheedlen Place and Mary Follett and Jennifer Armstrong from Hartley House. After eight weeks of classes held at Hartley House, the eleven member crew will spend the weekend out of town writing their final play in Tyler Hill. Performances will take place December 10 - 12.

So break out your date books, folks. The 52nd Street Project is coming and we're bringing Flyer bars. JMcG

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### Blast continued...

(twice!), and Desmond Robertson just kept yelling, to everyone's astonishment, "Fingos!" (it's a snack food). Out of all this wacky fun also bore more great plays: Charles Fuller (he won a Pulitzer Prize, okay?) wrote a play for Dion Graham as Joe Louis and Desmond "Fingo!" Robertson as the Kid who taught him how to throw a short right, Lili Taylor's pro-princess-as-ruler play for Fernando as Tilbogen the jester, Demetri Corbin's play for Erica Borrero which in the denouement she punches out *femme fatale* and 16 year-old Project veteran Shirley Rumierk, and Jerry McGill's play for Eddie Zambrano, in which Eddie, a 40's detective, is confronted by Louise Smith, a mysterious blonde as played by (yup) Jerry himself. As per the custom, we performed on Block Island for our pals there, and then back at EST for four shows.

Henry Krieger wrote thirty-four songs, gentle *PU* readers. Thirty-four, that is, in only two weeks time. This fact alone leaves us breathless. And Tim Ray came to Block Island from Boston to play the piano both there and back in New York (after thirty-four songs, Henry's fingers were exhausted!). Also joining us on the two trips away were junior counselors, Paula Myrie, Joanne Ramirez and Shirley Rumierk, as well as two observers from replication projects, Suzanne Glennon from Macon, GA and Marguerite Scott from Boston, MA. The Project would like to thank everyone who participated in the Blast From The Past trips away and performances.



The Blast From The Past Cast in Tyler Hill, PA



## GRAHAM WINDHAM

June Ballinger, artistic director of the replication project at Graham-Windham, rounded up her usual suspects (Sal Trapani, Susie Willerman, Emily Rubin, Judy Tate, Kent Alexander, Will Badgett, as well as some wonderful new initiates) to do a summer full of Graham-Windham programs. "The Heat Is On," Graham-Windham's third annual Playmaking program was a great success, and *The Other Side*, Graham-Windham's first One-on-One program was...a learning experience.

"The Heat Is On" had stories about ghosts, warlocks, devils, the trials and tribulations of the Slough family, and what can happen when your math teacher is a warlock (Will Badgett) and tries to eat you (only Peggity Price knows for sure), sibling rivalry between the Ralph Lauren (Tyrone Wilson) and Karl Kani (Suzanna Hay) labels, the rock (Larry Nathanson) and the spider (Victor Mack) taught us not to throw up on someone no matter how much you are afraid of them. There were lessons for everybody in this batch.

Six teenagers from Graham-Windham and six playwrights/actors, and June, Susie and Project alumna Jesse Soto blazed a Project trail in the Hamptons. Which part of the Hamptons were they in, you may ask? — all of them. Despite logistics and high emotions, the shows were truly rich and very much about the kids. Plans are in the making for continuing the programs at Graham-Windham, a residential treatment center in Hastings-on-Hudson, part of the Graham-Windham foster care program for abused and neglected children, and anyone interested in working with this particular population should call June or the office. JB

## PUTTING THE PRO IN PROJECT

Project participants young and old can be seen on the silver screen and the tube this year. The new program, "Citykids," which airs on Saturday mornings, will feature such young Project talent as Raymond Harold and Victor Rojas, not to mention the more mature talents of newlywed Karen Trott and Peter Jay Fernandez. The show's script supervisor is Project volunteer Becky Browder.

"Cop Give Waitress \$2M Tip" is the name of a new film in which Victor Rojas has a feature role. In the movie, the cop (played by new volunteer Project writer Francis Coppola's nephew, Nick Cage) wins two million dollars in the lottery. His pal is Jesus (the Peruvian side-kick, brilliantly portrayed by Victor), and when the cop wins the lottery he takes Jesus and his friends from the neighborhood to play baseball in Yankee Stadium for the day. When casting the parts of the kids, casting director and Project pal John Lyons called us up, suggesting that art should imitate life. We brought twenty kids to Central Park for a "softball audition" and the film's producer, Michael Lobell, and director, Andrew Bergman, chose 'em all. The group shot in Yankee Stadium in September, and they got free caps and a paycheck to boot. Bridget Fonda was overheard on the set looking for Blast From The Past characters, "Disco Diva" and "Trigonometries, the slave."

## FUNDING NEWS

Berrilla Kerr, playwright, bon vivant and Project supporter recently passed away, leaving behind fine friends, fine plays, and a new foundation. The Project was honored to be among the first round of distinguished grant recipients. The grant will be used to cover this year's Playback program, "Pivotal Roles."



Berrilla's vision was failing so she always sat in the front row. We will keep a seat open in the front row in memory of Berrilla and in honor of her vision.

We would also like to thank the following foundations and corporations who have lent their support to the Project this year:

Con Edison	\$1,000
Department of Youth Services (Borough President Grant)	\$5,000
Wasserstein-Perella	\$1,000

We are also grateful for an in-kind donation of software products from Adobe.

### NEIL MAZZELLA THWARTS GLOBAL DISASTER!

In a dashing display of heroics, Neil Mazzella and Hudson Scenic replaced our stolen rear projection screen just seconds before show-time during the Block Island One-on-Ones. In typically modest fashion Neil said, "I think I did what any man with a rear projection screen at his disposal would have done. I was acting on instinct." WR

### Tuba continued.....

Adan Sanchez also served as a performer. His portrayal of an empty bottle of Budweiser is one that will not soon be forgotten.

And what readings they were. Some of the many highlights include "Denise and Brad's Problem" by Herberta Lee, which featured a couple so afraid of commitment that every time they spoke of marriage, they fainted. In "Big Mountain" by Genevive Nelson, a grandfather won't allow his grandson, a medicine man and graduate student, to travel to Canada because his son (the student's father) was killed there. "All they have to know is that you're a Navajo to disrespect you....They'll know you're a Navajo, it'll be like a goose entering a crowd of ducks....I don't want two of the same hearts stopped in Canada." In "Unseen Friends" by Henrietta Lee, two ghosts come back from the dead to stop a girl from committing suicide, the play ends with the girl talking to her friend on the phone "Yes it's me. It's still me."

Thanks go out to all the kids for making the week in Tuba so incredible. Also our warmest thank yew's to Frances Begaye and her fabulous family: Glenmore, Dawn, Jessie and Bijibah for their help, hospitality, and typing skills. Special thanks also to Brad Weiland and Judith Littlefox and all the teachers who helped us through the week. We're hoping to go back in January to do more so stay tuned for Tuba II; Tuba Much. MB



Come and see our upcoming production, "Pivotal Roles" at the New York Theatre Workshop October 30, 31 and November 1. Check out the flyer inside.

The 52nd Street Project, Inc.  
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## PU POOP 'N' SCOOP

☞ *PU* editor's cousin and Project volunteer Alexandra Gersten married Johnny Vassilaros last month. You may remember last spring how Alex and her Greek coffee magnate beau single-handedly together seated thirty full-price fannys at the Project's benefit. Now to us that's a match heaven-made.

☞ Long-time Project volunteers Peter Herdrich and Karen Knot tied the oct in trotober. We mean tied the knot and may try a tot.

☞ And fresh on board Board member Larry Jones was so excited about working with children that he and his wife Richie had one! Their son, Khalil was born on September 4th: 7 lb. and 12 oz. Like fellow Project new-born, Cooper McClane, Khalil is a genius and at the age of three weeks can play the violin and is a chess master.

☞ Louis P. Friedman, another board member, married his fiancé (of all people!), Patrice Smith, in August. The two were seen wearing their teal and purple Project baseball caps on their honeymoon in Bora Bora. Willie has sent a letter to the Bora Bora Chamber of Commerce suggesting they replicate the Project there and bring him out for a residency in February.

☞ Since we're on the subject of board members doing radical things, *PU* readers should know that James McDaniel is in Los Angeles filming the controversial television series, "NYPD Blue" (a.k.a. Cheesecake Constables). Willie Reale was overheard by a *PU* Snoop begging Jim to return, and Jim's reply was, "I'm staying here to shoot 'NYPD Blue,' and that's final! No ifs, ands or butts." Project kid Alex Bess spent the summer with Jim and his family in LA.

☞ 12-year Project veteran Deneka Pensiton shuffled off to Buffalo's U. of B. to get an education and a good chicken wing recipe. If anyone has a racoon coat and a jalopy with a rumble seat or just good wishes to send, her address is: 421 Wilkeson Quadrangle, University of Buffalo, Buffalo, NY 14261-0421.

☞ Did anyone happen to see the August column on The 52nd Street Project's One-on-One program in the Style section? You know what that means? Soon the Project will be mainstream and overrated, and then in thirty years it can have a nostalgic come-back. The Project was also featured in American Theatre Magazine along with The Virginia Avenue Project in an article about the replication program. We have received calls from around the country by people who are interested in starting 52nd Street Project programs in their home town, which we find thrilling.

Members of the "Cop Gives Waitress \$2M Tip" Cast.



Photo: Stephanie Berger