

PROJECT UPDATE

VOLUME 15 FEBRUARY 1994

POWER PLAYS PLAYWRIGHTS

Mother Nature showed us an example of her power this winter with violent storms and record snowfall, but at the Playwrights Horizons Studio Theatre nine new Project kids, aged 7 to 15, conveyed their own notion of power. The weekend of December 10th-12th brought with it a blizzard of creativity known as The Power Plays and as was expected, the kids' ideas of power proved to be far more interesting (not to mention enjoyable) than grouchy, old Mama N's.

There were those who had too much power, Gloop (Leon Wilson) in Diana Rojas' "Power Hungry Cynthia" and Mr. Dark (Tom Carrozza) in Ahmed Attia's dark thriller, "The Stolen Moonlight." There were those who felt powerless like Dave (Carmen Elena Sosa) in Kevin Hartwick's chilling tale of hamster obsession, "The Playmasters," and Cupcake (Suzen Murakoshi) and Butterscotch (Susan Willerman) in Sahara Lynn Walsh's poetic parable, "The Dessert Meadow" (featuring Frank "Vanilla Ice" Wood). And then there were those who came to grips with the ultimate corruption of power like Christy (Marcell Rosenblatt) in Alex Metzler's super-comedy, "My Weekend Away," and Jasmin (Lisa Gay Hamilton) in Lakisha May's romp "Excuses."

Joseline Torres painted a powerful portrait in her engrossing story of urban life, "Going Through Changes." Characters like Jasmine (Juanita Vega) and Leroy (John Steber) touched our hearts when they found the power within themselves to care and be cared for in Jonsie Smith's moving play, "The Girl Under The Grates." Kevin (Don Berman) and Megan (Lisa Benavides) were moved to marriage by the power of love in Tessa Connor's exotic "Romantic Hotel." So powerful, in fact, was Tessa's writing that it has moved Lisa Benavides and new Project volunteer Tim Nelson to tie the knot themselves.

The Power Plays brought an array of new faces behind the scenes as well and we'd like to give a shout out to techies Chris "Chip" Wigle, George Babiak, Kim "Prop Goddess" Chandler and new directors Michael Angel Johnson, Martha Banta and Becky "Clam Chowder" Browder. Hi Beth Clancy!

We look forward to doing it all again this March with nine new kids and nine new plays in our first Playmaking series of '94, "All Mixed Up" at Ensemble Studio Theatre March 18th 19th and 20th. If you didn't get your flyer with your PU, call the reservations line, (212) 642-5141 for tickets. JMcG

And The Grand Prize Winning Joke is...

What do you call a birdsong that lasts almost a minute?

A fifty-seconds tweet.

More jokes on page 3...



NORVILLE HAS LAST WORD

In a related story, the "Today" show, which filmed a segment about the Playmaking class in 1990, has come back to do a follow-up piece, just as Deborah Norville promised. John, the camera operator, and Bob, the sound guy are the two technicians that created the 1990 televised masterpiece, and they enjoyed it so much they have returned to recreate the experience, joined by producer Donna Bass. They have been filming the Playmaking class, and will join us on the weekend away and at the performances to document the entire Playmaking process. We don't have an air date yet, but we'll let you PU readers know. If anyone knows of Ms. Norville's whereabouts, tell her thanks from us.

Meanwhile, you can hear an excerpt from the next Playmaking show on WNYC's "New York Kids," the only kids call-in radio show around. A playwright from the current Playmaking class will make an "appearance" on the talk show with his or her cast, who will do a live reading of his or her play. Tune in to 93.9 FM on Sunday, March 13th between 6:00 - 8:00 pm, and if you're a kid, call up and say "hi."

BABBLING BROOKS AN AUDIENCE PROFILE

Fred and Rita Brooks never miss a show, "Unless we're out of town." The Brooks have been regular Project fans and supporters for four or five years. "I love children and how their minds go when they're being creative," says Rita who has been married to Fred since "before you got here." The Brooks' discovered the Project from a newspaper piece. "Rita reads everything that there is pertaining to children," says Fred, a retired supervisor for the MTA. "We have no children and we love children, especially the boys."

The Brooks are seasoned travelers and have been to "every place you could name and some you can't." Their latest travel idea is a steamboat trip down the Mississippi. Fred promises the Project will "see something right off the top" if he hits big at the gaming tables.

Ever active, the Brooks' were undaunted by the recent spate of harsh weather. "I love the weather," reports Fred, "We were out there walking around in the streets,

playing in the snow and eating in the uncrowded restaurants." On the subject of age, Rita instructs "You put in that paper that these two people are ageless. I like to say I'm ageless timeless spaceless and laced in fineness." We agree.

Fred and Rita Brooks posing on the deck of the QE II (really, they are).



FIFTY TWO-BA

Once again your fearless Project staff ventured forth to Greyhills Academy in Tuba City, Arizona for some Navajo reservation replication. You may recall that in September we took eleven students through the Playmaking process and presented the plays they wrote in a reading at the end of the week. Well, thanks to a grant from the Educational Foundation of America to Greyhills, the Project returned in January to put on a big, big shew.

On January 28th, Project volunteers met up with ten Greyhills students in Santa Fe, New Mexico. We planted our pencils at the idyllic Sol y Sombra, the former home of Georgia O'Keefe, which was generously donated to the program for the essentials: writing and eating. The weekend was spent working on plays, touring the groovy facilities like the solar greenhouse and the permaculture rock gardens and eating the wonderful food which was permaculturally grown in said solar green house. In fact, the only foreign substance in the entire Sol y Sombra ecosystem was us.

Once back in Tuba City, we began the second phase of the work: the simple task of putting up ten plays in six days! It was a bi-coastal affair as actors and dramaturgs Willy Holtzman, Paul McCrane, Tanya Rowe-Russel, Daryl Theirse, Karen Trott and Pamala Tyson came out from Los Angeles and New York, not to mention Howard Korder, who came from his new home in Santa Fe, and Adan Sanchez who breezed in from Albuquerque. Like a well-oiled machine we rehearsed and refined the plays while we retired any hope of rest. As the show slowly took shape so did the theater. Kevin Joseph Roach and Greg MacPherson, ably assisted by Greyhills superman Paul Huber hung a light grid and built a re-usable Project-style set in the Greyhills auditorium. Andrea Harris, who came to Tuba hoping for some sun, fun and relaxation, was immediately put to over-work and forced to make props, slides, and work backstage. Upon boarding the plane home, Andrea was heard muttering, "Give me earthquakes and mudslides, I need a rest."

By the end of the week we had ten new plays ready to go. We opened on Sunday and on Monday morning crammed about two hundred and fifty audience members into a one hundred seat house! We had plays about racism toward Navajos, the clash between a traditional medicine man and his grandson a medical student, and a desperate woman talked out of suicide by the ghost of a deceased friend. Some of the highlights of the show included Paul McCrane as the God of Pain inhabiting the body of Baby Blue as played by Michaela Murphy, Adan Sanchez as many wise old grandfathers, and the Project's artistic staff showing their true nature as a couple of Nintendo-playin' girl-avoidin' metal heads. Even Max Wilk, dramaturg, grandfather, Project lox-smith and wilderness tumbler graced the stage as Nelson, the hapless neighbor in Jackson Whiterock's "Don't Trust Promises."

Look for further developments in the Greyhills project as they start to take off and produce plays on their own without a bunch of loudmouthed New Yorkers telling them how to do it.

MB



New Project Playwrights with Old Project staff: (fr. left to right): Jackson, Berthilda, Alex, Herberta, Genevieve, and Dodo.

photo: Michael Bernard

FIFTY BEMIDJI?

Bemidji, Minnesota is renowned as one of the coldest places in the continental United States, and last November it was definitely one of the coolest. Two weekends before Thanksgiving, and two teams of New York Playmakers led by Daniel Judah Sklar and Michaela Murphy with Project pals Juanita Vega, Kent Alexander, Susie Willerman and Joe White made a Playmaking pilgrimage to this northern border town of four Ojibwe/Chippewa reservations. There, they guided twenty-one Chippewa teenagers through an intense weekend of writing, writing and more writing. When the smoke cleared, twenty-one new plays were on the table. On Sunday these plays were featured in an afternoon of readings attended by parents and friends who grooved and enthused to this cool cat event.

And so how, you may wonder, did Playmaking come to Bemidji? Well, here's the skinny. Last summer these 21 not-yet playwrights participated in a five-week course of study modeled after the Native American College Preparatory School in Irvine, CA. As part of the summer program, two academic "reunion" weekends were planned. However, what does one do with twenty-one teenagers in Bemidji when it's zero degrees outside? Project friend Barbara Ettinger knew a little Playmaking might make for a rollicking reunion weekend. The rest is history. Our many thanks to Barbara for including Playmaking in this special program. It was an excellent experience and we all hope that it can happen again. Our best to Paul and Babe.

Michaela Murphy

BIG DEAL

In a relatively related story, Dramatists Play Service, the publishing company has agreed to distribute and market the replications volumes which the Project intends to publish this year (no, really, we mean it this time). Good news? You bet! The Project is thrilled to be published among so many fine writers.

PROGRAMS, PROGRAMS GETCHA NEW PROGRAMS HERE

What, you may ask is going down every Sunday night at four o'clock at New Dramatists? It's the newest 52nd Street Project program. One so new, so exciting, so unique, that no one has bothered to take the time to give it a name! The group is led by George Babiak and me, and made up of older Project kids (the ones who have done all the programs we already got and we still can't get rid of them), and some long-time Project adult volunteers. Each week we get together, spend about 30-45 minutes talking about stuff that's on our minds, then we get up and improvise some scenes about it. We're hoping to script some of the more engaging ideas into a show some time in the far future. Keep an eye glued tightly on this space if you want glue in your eye. We'll let you know when a performance is nigh. MB

In April, 1987 The 52nd Street Project presented "Plays for Pairs" at Playwrights Horizons, plays written and directed by adult artists for two youngsters to perform together. The program was called the "Two-on-Two's" as it brings together pairs of youngsters with pairs of adults. Well, the Project has resurrected the Two-on-Two's for the graduates of the Replay class. Six plays will be produced at the West Bank Downstairs Theatre Bar for two nights only, Monday, April 18th, and Tuesday, April 19th. The list of participants was not available at press time, but look for information coming soon to a mailbox near you. Non-alcoholic beverages will be served exclusively at the bar; we won't say what kind but there is a one-scoop minimum.

TWO-EE SMILES!

PROJECT GETS LOTS A YUKS & LOTS A BUCKS

Every year The 52nd Street Project sends out a year-end appeal and contest. "Make Two-ee Crack A Smile" was the name of the 1993 fundraiser involving the Project logo's tragic Two-ee and comic Five-ee in a bad joke repartee. The object game was to write a joke hilarious enough to make the perpetually melancholic Two-ee smile. Contestants were given four choices of joke genres and a winner was chosen in every category, each of whom received a box of the new scrumptious Flyer Gold 3 Candy Bar, with milk chocolate and almonds (mmmm....). Judy Minor, a new volunteer to the Project, was the grand prize winner. Judy won two tickets to Neil Simon's play about joke writers, "Laughter on The 23rd Floor," which starring Project pal Mark Linn Baker, who bears resemblance to Five-ee. Multitudinous thanks to John Paris and Manny Azenberg for their donation of prizes to our contest, and to all the Project donors who wrote serious checks and funny jokes to keep Five-ee, Two-ee and all the Project kids smiling.

Here are the contest winners, along with some not-so honorable mentions:

Knock Knock Category

Flavia Grimm, winner

Knock knock.

Who's there?

Heather.

Heather who?

Hey there, you with the stars in your eyes.

Sloane Shelton, honorable mention

Knock knock.

Who's there?

Mayonnaise.

Mayonnaise who?

Mayonnaise have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Riddle Category

Becky Browder & Ted Neustadt, winners

What has red hair and comes in a bowl?

Becky Browder clam chowder.

Larry Jones, honorable mention

Why does rain fall?

Because it tripped on its way down.

Shaggy Dog Category

Sue Steiner & Lori Boatwright, winners

A whale and a sardine are best friends. They go drinking together every night at the same bar. Night after night, they are always together. One night the sardine shows up without the whale. The bartender comes up to him and says, "Hey little fellow. Where is your big friend?" And the sardine replies, "What, am I my blubber's kipper?"

Judy Blume & George Cooper, honorable mention

Blah blah blah blah blah.....blah, Fluffy.

Freestyle Category

Barbara McCrane & Paul Reale, winners

Ooh, dearest Two-ee

Smile at this mere haiku-ee

If not, boo-hoo-ee

Ms. McCrane had this to say when she accepted her prize. "I'd like to thank the inventors of the haiku for creating such a wonderful form within which I could work. I'd like to thank Two-ee for her generosity of spirit during the judging, and most of all I'd like to thank the judges for having such vision and seeing that a smile is not just a cheap laugh at a cheap knock knock joke, but a reflection of the inner-warmth that one feels when one is truly moved by a work of art."

Other honorable mentions include Jeffrey Gross for his inventive and most original entry: a comic strip of "Bazooka Two-ee," including a fortune ("Help! I'm stuck on Block Island without a partner!"), and volunteer fire-chief-certified house manager Peter Manning sent the following: Knock knock. *Who's there?* Fire Guard Manning? *Oh god, help us!*

ONE PART BENEFIT TWO PART HARMONY

In a related story of giving money to The 52nd Street Project, we are happy to announce our second annual spring gala, *Two Part Harmony*. It will be held on May 9th at the newly refurbished ballroom in the Toy Building. The honorary chairs for the event are Golden Globe winner/Academy Award nominees Angela Bassett and Holly Hunter, and John Leguizamo, who we're certain is soon to win many awards. The evening will consist of dinner, dancing and duets sung, ala Project, by kids and well-known performers. The Project has asked "notable" composers to create original duets. Already scheduled to write songs are Project maestro Henry Krieger and Michael John LaChiusa, and signed up to sing are Laurie Beechman, all-around good guy-good dad Bernard Gersten, and hopefully one or all of our honorary chairs. Plus a handful of young 52nd Street Project ringers. And to top it all off, corporate sponsors Paris Chocolates, and Kiehl's, are donating products for a stunning gift bag. It should be a grand night of fun. For more information, call Jenny at the office.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR SELLS OUT BENEFIT SCREENING WILL TOO

The 52nd Street Project will benefit from a preview screening of "The Hudsucker Proxy," a new Ethan and Joel Coen film starring Paul Newman, Tim Robbins, and Jennifer Jason Leigh. The film also features a one-line cameo by artistic director Willie Reale. "This is just the beginning. I've been talking to my agents about parlaying this Project stuff into a film career. They seem to think I can handle more demanding roles that might have two, three, even ten lines. I think I'm ready for that kind of challenge, particularly in light of recent strides made in teleprompting."

The date for the screening is Monday, March 7th at 7:30 pm at the Loew's 84th Street. Tickets cost \$20, and seating is limited. To order tickets, call Project HQ, (212) 764-1379.

FUNDING NEWS

The Project would like to gratefully acknowledge the following foundations and corporations for the following grants:

The BETA Fund	\$5,000
D-B Trust	\$5,000
The Dammann Fund	\$7,500
William and Mary Greve Foundation	\$5,000
Kiehl's	\$1,400
Marquis George MacDonald Foundation	\$500
James Macdonald Foundation	\$600
Ann M. Martin Foundation	\$7,500
Morgan Guaranty	\$5,000
Morgan Stanley	\$5,000
National Endowment for the Arts	\$10,000
The New York Times Company. Foundation	\$7,000
New York State Council on the Arts	\$5,000
Jules & Doris Stein Foundation	\$5,000

On behalf of everyone at The 52nd Street Project, thank you.

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the flyer inside.

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REPLAY

The newly revamped Replay Ensemble rolled in to a theater near you on October 11th, OOPS!, November 11th, and despite a few technical glitches managed to be quite an entertaining ticket. Performed in the roomy upstairs Theatre at New Dramatists (thanks to the second power New D!) by 24 kids the evening proved to be:

Fun

"That's Amoré" by Jeffrey Zambrano featuring Jed Clark as a tortured slice of pizza and Andre Parks as a yellow cab.

Zany

"Joseph's Play" by guess who? DUH! Joseph Jackson featuring Raymond Harold as a Tonka truck and Fernando Ramirez as a BMW. This play also proved to be an existential phenom with many audience members debating over whether it was more reminiscent of Samuel Beckett, Jean Paul Sartre or Jean Claude Van Damme.

Provocative

"Elisa's Play" by, must we go through this again?, Elisa Mohamed featuring Natasha Soto as a patient taking her doctor (Wendell Borrero) to court on charges that he molested her during a routine check-up.

For the next round of Replay there will be two more handfuls of Project kids in a class which will culminate in the reading of their plays at the third-annual Project Picnic in Clinton Corners on Saturday, April 30th. Mark your calendars and let us know so that we may throw another chicken leg on the barbie for ya! JMcG



Photo by: Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

PROJECT HAT INSPIRES WORLD PEACE

Project brother and peace activist Jim Reale went to Bosnia to demonstrate for peace. On the road to Mostar he gave his Project hat to this little girl. We at the Project are thinking peaceful thoughts under our Project hats for a solution to be found there. WR