

PROJECT UPDATE

Volume 41; November, 2002

Editor: George R. Babiak

Ode to the Road

If you wanna do a show about the road, it helps to hit it first. With that in mind, the Project loaded up a bunch of motor vehicles with wiffle balls and beach towels and eager children and headed for our favorite piece of land completely surrounded by water, **Block Island**. The road proved to be long, with many a winding turn. The island proved to be as lovely as ever. The sun was out, the surf was up, and everybody was down (as in psyched, pumped, fired up-not as in sad, depressed, or bummed, mind you). After a week had passed, for a refresher, we hit the road again (we just couldn't wait) and headed for our favorite summer venue, the **Ensemble Studio Theatre** on N.Y.C.'s finest street, number **52**. It was here that our kid/adult pairs presented their extravaganzae for a discerning, non-paying midsummer audience.

The theatrical expedition started with a murder attempt(!?!): **Jessalyn Gilsig's** early bird tried to get **Jazzy Hernandez's** worm in **Michael Bernard's** *Shermie The Wormie*. Thankfully, the laws of nature got broken and the two are now living happily ever after in Miami. Not to be outdone in terms of fun and sun, **Susan McGinnis** and **Leah Galimidi** traveled to Hawaii and went native in **Julie McKee's** *A Thing For Islands*. **Carlo Alban** and **Anthony Mejia** trumped them all by packing us off to St. Tropez in **David Schwab's** *J'ai Peur...Moi Aussi*. (That's French for "We're Both Yeller"). Just in case anyone was feeling homesick, **Jim Stevenson** set *Happy Trails* in the Big Apple itself. In that show, **Niambi Nataki** and **Suzette Santana** were at odds until they broke some furniture. After that, they were fine. The first act's final destination was the Great Beyond, where **Kenajuan Bentley** and **Kimani Lewis-Ashley** discussed the relative merits of bran flakes in **Willie Reale's** *Having Seen The Light*.



Solangee Acosta and Stephanie Bast sell their show



JOHN SHEEHY

The Block Island Kids L to R, back row: **Kimani Lewis-Ashley, Solangee Acosta, Suzette Santana, Megan Cruz, Anthony Mejia.** Front: **Stephen and Leah Galimidi, Jazzy Hernandez, Alex Tomas, and Tiffany Paget.**

to the bottom of the sea, where whiz kid **Alex Tomas** was saved from Davey Jones' Locker by a real live mermaid. In **Doug Lockwood's** *Baggage*, **Megan Cruz** took a radical stance by forbidding travel, encouraging all of us to stay at home and deal with our problems. **Monique Curnen** and **Tiffany Paget** sure wish they'd listened, after they found themselves stranded at sea and contemplating cannibalism in **John Sheehy's** lighthearted *Coffee, Tea Or My Left Foot*. At least they got rescued. In **Bruce MacVittie's** *Still Waiting For...*, **David Costabile** and **Stephen Galimidi** were still waiting for you-know-who when the lights went down. As of last Tuesday, you-know-who still hadn't shown, and Stephen had already missed the first month of school. We're not sure what to do about it.

Anyway, none of us would have gotten out of the driveway without the help of many good people, including our hosts on Block Island: **Pat McQuade** and **Martha Velie-Gass**; **Josie Merck** and **Jim Stevenson**; **Eliot** and **Amy Nerenberg**; **Jennifer** and **Elliot Taubman**; **Diane Tripler** and **Don Frageau**; **Ron, Judy** and **Kevin Tierney**; **Joya Verde** and **Anthony, Nicole** and **Thomas Frye** and **Virginia Dare**; and our headquarters host **Dr. Christina Biaggi**. Our stage manager **Perry McBain-Daniel** was an excellent combination of effervescence and efficiency, especially as Number One Pie Lady. **Kim Sherman** wrote us FIFTEEN songs for the road, and every one of them made the miles fly by.

GR

The cast of *Ten for the Road*, Wareham, Ma.



Disaster Fails to Strike Wareham

We were a little anxious at the prospect of spending a week in August in **Wareham, MA**. After all, our only previous Wareham One-on-One experience was marred by **Hurricane Bob** which struck in 1991 and stranded a group of Project kids and adults with no gas, electricity, or running water. But, much to our delight, our second try was not as tempestuous. In fact, it was halcyon.

The August gang put on a stellar show for the poor folks in Wareham who had been patiently waiting for nine years to see it. Kicking the whole shebang off were **Wonkezeh Newenle** and **Shirley Rumierk** in *Big John*, **Michael Bernard's** yarn about a breakdancin' drifter and the stylish sheriff who discovers the truth about his checkered past. *Oz Again* pitted a disillusioned Dorothy (**Suzen Murakoshi**) against a relative of the Wicked Witch (**Nikki Rosario**). In this version (by Suzen and **Willie Reale**), the two turn out to be long-lost sisters (duh). *Just The Cash*, by **Joe Mihalow**, was up next, featuring **Ariana Casablanca** as a bank robber who wants to be a meter maid and **Tom Schall** as her nay-saying partner in crime. **Bruce MacVittie** continued his trend of updating great literature in *On the Road: The Prequel*. **Alex Kehr's** groovy Dean Moriarty inspired Bruce's glum Sal Paradise to jettison his baggage, kick off his shoes, and embrace the elusive "IT." The first act closed with **Zabryna Guevara's** *The Mad Experiment*, in which a ranting and raving **Ani Kehr** discovered that it's better to be friends with a monster than with a hand puppet.

After an interlude blessed by tasty new **Flyer Bar** flavors, the second act took flight with *Ground Crew* **Gary Takes Off**, by **Josh Lewis**, featuring **Michael Velez** as a heroic ground crew technician (the guy who wears the big orange headphones). **Angel Desai** was a reluctant trained dog and **Katie Grullon** the clown who loved her – or at least needed her to jump through some hoops – in **Cindy Kaplan's** *Clown Time is Over*. **Jerry McGill** returned to the Project stage in *Up in Arms*, playing a man with too many arms. **Joanna Vidal** was his sister, a woman with too few – but she loved him anyway. Speaking of love, in *Mack and May*, **Mack (Zebulon Santiago)** appeared to love his money more than his wife, **May (Keira Naughton)**. As it turned out, he loved them pretty much equally. Last up was **Robert Sean Leonard's** *The Painter*, in which reclusive genius **Mike Grullon** rebuffed his brother's attempts to disturb his solitude. In the end, he was finally won over by a pretty girl (winsome intern **Charlotte Howard**, now back at Yale. Winsome, lose some).

The show went great, thanks in no small part to the talents of **Maestra Amy Kohn** tickling the ivories. However, in spite of the glamour of the footlights and the greasepaint, we couldn't help but hearken back to that lovely week by the sea in Wareham. It wouldn't have been nearly so lovely if not for our hosts, **Helen, Peter, and Christopher Randolph** (doing double duty as Chief Chef), who are just plain fun to hang around with. Their generosity was rivaled only by that of the wonderful families who took such good care of the kids and adults all week: **Gary & Sam Gray, Anne & Colin McNay, Joe and Beth McNay, Emily & John Morgan, Susanne & John Potts, and Sidney Worthen & David Pearce**. One last thing to add to the aren't-we-lucky file: we were lucky to have THREE all-grown-up Project kids involved in this landmark show – actress **Shirley Rumierk**, sound board op **Ray Harold**, and costume assistant **Jennifer Jimenez**. We knew we brought them up right!

MSZ

FUN and FUNDS

On August 7th, the Project held one of the highlights of a season full of highlights, the Annual Scholarship Party. Once again taking up the hosting duties was invaluable Project Board Member **Jenny Wiener** with her partner (and soon to be husband) **Jon Steingart**. As in the past, the bash featured fabulous soul food, libations, endlessly entertaining chatter with Project vols, family and supporters, and of course, the doling out of checks to students continuing their education past high school. In fact, just about the only thing different about this party was the location--the sumptuous offices of the **Ars Nova Theatre** on West 54th Street.

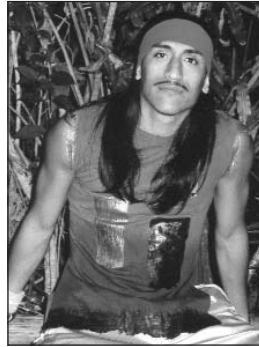
Scholarship recipients qualify for scholarships by being a new student, or by maintaining a 3.0 grade point average or higher. This year's awardees are **Jill Barbosa** (Hostos Community College), **William C. Brown** (Potomac State College), **Jed Clarke** (Bard College), **Eddie Cooper** (Ithaca College), **Nyita Hanley** (SUNY, New Paltz), **Ray Harold** (SUNY Purchase), **Zsuzsa Mysak** (SUNY Purchase), **Lori Ann Quinones** (The American Musical and Dramatic Academy), **Diana Rojas** (La Guardia Community College), **Mary Vamvoukakis** (Marymount College of Fordham University), **Natasha Soto** (Borough of Manhattan Community College) **Sahara Walsh** (Hunter College) and **Eddie Zambrano** (Borough of Manhattan Community College). Thanks to all who attended or sent in donations and made the party a huge

JS

"Where Are They Now?" Department
VICTOR ROJAS

We were delighted when the all-grown-up Victor Rojas dropped by last week. It gave us a splendid opportunity to goof off... er, catch up with an old friend.

Now 22 years-old, Victor was born in Lima, Peru and came to the U.S. when he was 7. When Victor was 8 he joined the Project with his sister **Diana** (today our beloved Executive Assistant).

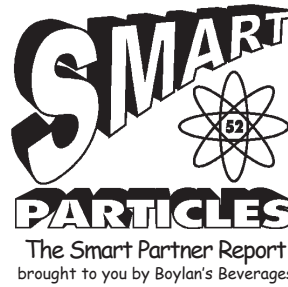


Victor appeared in many memorable plays, including ones authored by **Spalding Gray** and **Francis Ford Coppola**. He took to acting with a vengeance, landing bit parts in the films *Die Hard With A Vengeance* and *It Could Happen to You*. Victor also played Orsino in our teen production of *Twelfth Night*, which was performed in New York and the south of France.

In his senior year at **La Guardia High School**, Victor took a class at the **Broadway Dance Center** and discovered a new talent. "I took ballet, jazz, modern, hip-hop... It was a gift that came out of nowhere," he says, "I became a teacher's assistant in six months."

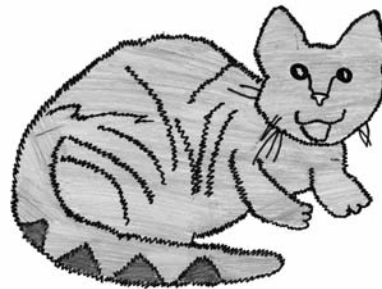
After graduating, Victor studied acting at N.Y.U. for a couple of semesters and worked a brief stint at the Sony Wonder Center as an "exhibit explainer" (He refused to exhibit his explaining skills). Although the theater was his first love, Victor's life soon became consumed by dance. A friend hired him for a promotional tour and ever since he has worked non-stop for a wide array of artists, including **Pink, Mya, Mario, Joe, 3LW, Kelis**, and (in a rare departure from single-named performers), **Alicia Keys**. Victor has also appeared in a number of videos and at the **Soul Train Music Awards**. He even helped choreograph Alicia's dance turn on the **Grammies**. This fall, Mr. Rojas expects to travel to Toronto to be in a feature film about dance. He hopes this will lead to more acting work. "I find that acting can challenge me more than dance," he says.

Victor gives a lot of credit to the Project for his career today. "I would not be the same person if I hadn't done the Project. It prepared me for society." His parting message to our kids: "Don't let anybody tell you 'No.' Follow your dreams. Follow them, follow them, follow them, because they're totally attainable." GB



Hey there, Projectiles! It's your new **Director of Education** here, **Liz Bell**. That still sounds great after a whole summer of adjusting to my new position. My first step was to attend nearly every performance of this summer's One-on-Ones. Yep, that was me—in the back row laughing hysterically, or standing in the darkened wings singing along ... at least until Megan turned to me with a frantic, "Sshh!" Apparently I didn't realize I was breaking a rule so clearly spelled out for the Project children.

In August, Megan and I held the first "**Break it Up: Art Week**," devoted to cultivating youthful artistic talent. Each morning, **Solangee Acosta, Victor Cortes, Leah & Stephen Galimidi, Ani & Alex Kehr, Madelyne Ross-Powell, Suzette Santana, Robert & Alex Tomas**, and **Johanna Vidal** met a different visual artist. First up was **Josephine Elke**, an incredible artist who not only donated sketchbooks, pencils, and erasers for each child but also



"Florian Cat" by Solangee Acosta

gave a lesson on shading and drawing faces. On Tuesday, we traveled to the colorful Soho studio of the established N.Y.C. painter **Jonathan Cramer**, who collaborated with the kids on an abstract piece modeled after his own series of paintings. In

the middle of the week, our own in-house talent, **George "X-acto" Babiak**, let us in on the secrets of Project prop-making. Each kid got to draw, color, and cut out their own foam-core prop, and then use it in a short improvisation. Next we took the elevator up to the sixth floor in our own building to find three more artists. The multi-talented **Doug Florian** gave us a lesson on illustration. **Mikel Glass** explained how lighting affects the shape of every subject we draw. Finally, **Michael Mason** introduced us to the wonderfully messy world of clay, giving us the chance to get a little under our own nails! The resulting masterpieces from the whole week will be displayed at the Clubhouse in the weeks to come, so please stop by to check them out!

The Project Clubhouse is bumpin' now that the school year has begun (By the time you read this, the official **Smart Partner Kick-off Party** will have been held on September 30th at the Clubhouse). Now that SP season is underway, I encourage every kid to stop by after school for a snack, some conversation, and some help with their homework from the staff and volunteers.

And kids, I am so thrilled with my new job, it will be months before I start to mind when you accidentally call me "Julie." LB



The following foundations, corporations and government agencies recently made generous grants to the Project. We are grateful to them for their support as well as to the many individuals who help sustain the Project's programs year-round.

Blythmour Corporation	\$2,000
Eleanor, Adam & Mel Dubin Foundation	\$1,000
Major League Baseball	\$1,000
New York State Council on the Arts	\$15,750
Pfizer Foundation	\$1,000
Philip Morris Employee Fund	\$10,000

The 52nd Street Project
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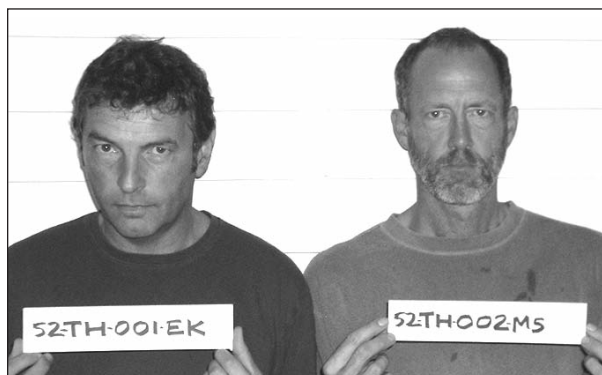
Anthony Mejia
does his chores
in "J'ai Peur...
Moi Aussi."

JLS



Eric Karpeles & Mike Sell

Place of birth - Mike: "In a galaxy far far away (Fullerton California)." Eric: Mt. Sinai Hospital, NYC **Current Habitat** - Tyler Hill, Pennsylvania
Occupation - Mike: Visual artist Eric: Painter **Why do you do what you do?** - Mike: "I have no idea." Eric: "Velázquez, Cézanne and deKooning;"
What do you do for the Project? - Mike: "Ten years of hosting One-On-Ones and Playmaking." Eric: "Feed hungry people—about 9000 platefuls of food over the last ten years."
Hobbies - Mike: "Building stone walls; Recovering from building stone walls." Eric: "Reading, eating and talking with friends at the dinner table, petting Walter the cat."
Last Book Read - Mike: "Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate' (Government sleaziness is an historical constant.)" Eric: "The Coast of Utopia" by Tom Stoppard.
Favorite thing about the Project - Mike: "A respite from sleaziness." Eric: "Playmaking shows."
Best 52nd Street Project Memory - Mike: "Kevin Geer as the hapless Louise, dragged away by the authorities after being framed by her pet giraffe and her television set." Eric: "Jennifer Soccaros' smile."
Advice to kids - Mike: "Beware of television." Eric: "Believe in yourself."
On Flyer Bars: Mike: "From the look on people's faces, they are apparently delicious." Eric: "Go for the big dark chocolate bars—enough for you and your pals in the lobby during intermission."



LARRY NATHANSON

We happily announce the engagement of ProjVol **Sharon Washington** to long-time beau **Chuck Schultz**. Their nuptials are planned for November. Soon after Sharon hinted to Chuck that it might be time to get engaged, he told her that she had to help him look for a new office space. He took her to a building in the jewelry district and from there up to a man's office whose business card read "Trust and Estates Jewelry." Was she suspicious? – not a glimmer. Finally, Chuck told the man to drop the pretense. Sharon nearly dropped out of her chair.

Babies-a-poppin! On August 16th, 7.7 lb. **Noah Jackson Leopold** was born to ProjVol **Sarah Winkler** and **Simon Leopold**. On September 15th **Emanuel Harry Jacobson** was born to delighted ProjVols **Peter Jacobson** and **Whitney Scott**. Emanuel weighed in at 4.4 lbs. Peter was heard to say, "What do you expect? His parents are small too." The family is home now and all are well. Just in under the deadline is **Aaron Wolf Fig** born to ProjVol **Laura Sametz** and Late Night drummer **Anton Fig**. He tipped the scales at 5.8 lbs. Given his parentage, it is no surprise that he is already banging his rattle to the beat.

All the moms above can get some support from a new film, *Baby, I'm Yours*, by board member **Wendy Ettinger** and **Donna Wick**. The film was recently showcased on *Oprah*. Wendy and Donna appeared on the show with volunteer/board member **Wendy vanden Heuvel** and our own **Gus Rogerson** and his wife (and ProjVol) **Robin Morse**. Gus & Robin were the comic highlights of both the film and the show and Gus is now officially a "SNAD" (Sensitive New Age Dad). The film looks fantastic and should air on the Oxygen Network sometime in 2003.

Board Member **Jenny Wiener** and **Jon Weingart** tied the knot on Sunday, September 22nd at Jenny's lovely family home in Roxbury, CT. **Gina Torres** and **Laurence Fishburne** chose the same day but a different location to perform the same ritual. Mazeltov!

Finally, warm felicitations to our sister project in Los Angeles, **The Virginia Avenue Project**, on their 10th anniversary. Way to go!

CO

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