

PROJECT UPDATE

Volume 43; July, 2003

Editor: George R. Babiak

You can't knock Knock Wood

We kicked off the vernal season (such as it was) with *Knock Wood: The Superstitious Plays*, ten kid-written plays that ran in March at the **Samuel Beckett Theater**, which is in the sleek new **Theatre Row** complex (don't ask us why they spell theater two ways).

The first show of the night was *The 92 That Changed Everything*, **Nicole Fargardo's** ode to teen romance and portable baking units. **Alex Draper** and **Phyllis Somerville** really cooked. *Coney Island Wedding Deal*, by **Steven Castellanos**, continued the theme of romance by matching up a predatory alligator (**Kenajuan Bentley**) and the mythical figure Turtle of Life (**Sonia Manzano**). **Aladino Olivares' The Audition** told the tale of a troubled young boy who finds redemption as the lead in his high school play. **Joel de la Fuentes** was the redeemed child, **Malinda Walford** his dedicated teacher.

Raven's Bad Luck, by **Christine Tomas**, actually employed the theme. **Mandy Gonzalez** played an unlucky lawyer who consults a gypsy (**Shirley Rumierk**) on how to lift a curse. The evening then took a very, very serious turn with **Amanda Santos' Reunited**. **Angel Desai** and **José Soto** were an alcoholic mother with AIDS and an angry son who overcome their differences.

Then came 15 minutes when the audience, overcome with emotion, rose as one and exited. They refused to sit back down until they'd had reassuring chats with their friends.

Act II opened with a scathing political satire. **Isaac Goodman-Boyd**, author of *The Man That Rules Us All*, dissected the psychology of a war-mongering president. **Kevin O'Rourke** was you-know-who and **Josh Lewis** was his idealistic "most important helper." In *The Wish*, by **Erica Arce**, we saw **Perry Daniel** as a dalmatian ringmaster (will those spotted costumes never wear out?) and **Sarah Kay** as an artistically-inclined elephant. The flip-side of the circus was explored in **Harlo Ulloa's The Clown Destroyer**, which featured **Frank Wood** as a brutally homicidal clown and **David Chandler** as the super-powered policeman who brings him to justice.

Alone, by **Skye Blu Welsh**, tackled the eternal problem of sibling rivalry. **Elise Hernandez** and **Julia Gibson** played sparring sisters, inventively named Heaven and Nevaeh. The evening came to a bittersweet end in *Fighting In the Sewers* by **Jose Martinez**. **Ben Shenkman** and **Catherine Mueller** were Spike Shell Iguana and Crabhead Chicken, a pair of mutants who battle, make peace, and then return to their respective lives.

We were lucky to have dramaturg/directors like the acerbic **Maury Schott**, the intrepid **John Steber**, the patient **Greg Allen**, the bespectacled **Sandra McClain**, the charismatic **Denise Burse**, the vociferous **George Babiak**, the serene **Nicole Watson**, the charming **Louise Andrews**, the impeccable **Sheryl Kaller**, and the ebullient **Larry Nathanson**. We also owe a debt of gratitude to the melodious **Loren Toolajian**, our composer, the stylish **Crystal Thompson**, our costume designer, the luminous **Greg MacPherson**, our lighting designer, the audible **Vanessa Valdes**, our sound designer, and, finally, to the meticulous **Katherine Lumb**, our stage manager. Oh, yes...thank you, **Mr. Roget**. GB



So Sewer!: **Catherine Mueller** and **Ben Shenkman** as *Crabhead Chicken* and *Spike-shell Iguana*.

GRB

Replay Revamped

On the one balmy Monday night this June, some of NYC's finest actors and directors were at **The West Bank Café**. Whooping it up on their night off? Naaahhh – they were performing staged readings of exciting new works by young playwrights. Very young playwrights. The evening was the culmination of the Replay class, wherein kids have a chance to hone their skills in an advanced writing workshop. The plays were performed to great acclaim.

The evening began with **Chassity Damiani's** madcap *Violet's Revenge*, in which a lonely young girl turns everyone she sees into candy. Luckily, she's stopped by the super-hero team of Cloudman and Meltman (making a return appearance after their debut in Chassity's Playmaking show last year). Next up, in *When Bad Things Go Good* by **Mordecai Santiago**, a man is kicked out of the house and taken in by his friend's grumpy mom (named "Mom"). **Megan Cruz's Future World** presented a vision of 3003. But some things never change – two girls were still

fighting over a boy. *Woman and Man*, by **Yaiana Vasquez Tineo**, mined yet another timeless theme: a woman willing to settle for a man who doesn't cook or clean – as long as he keeps her pockets lined. **Eddie Cuevas'** hip-hop jam, *Free Will*, had a reluctant rapper finding his voice after some encouragement from a friend. **Jazzlyn Hernandez** pretty much said it all in the title of her play about a boy struggling with changes in his mother's personality after she becomes sick: *Just Because We're Related Doesn't Mean We Have to Get Along*. In **John Cuevas'** *One Chance*, a devoted Vince Carter fan has a chance to meet his idol, an encounter that gives him a new outlook on perseverance, friendship, and punctuality. **Merlaine Mendez's** fable, *Death*, told a tale of a girl whose past literally returns to haunt her. Finishing off the evening was **Christopher Ramirez's** *Gossip Womans*, which pitted the dames of the title against each other in a noir-ish showdown. To take the edge off of such heady fare, everyone stuck around to consume vast quantities of rice pudding and chocolate cake, courtesy of the West Bank. Oh, what a night!

We're grateful to **Steve Olson, Hank Meiman**, and The West Bank Café for making this evening possible. And, of course, the artists who brought the kids' plays to life. Our dynamite directors were: **George Babiak, Dion Graham, Peter Jay Fernandez, Tim Blake Nelson, Megan Sandberg-Zakian, Erica Schmidt, Seret Scott, John Sheehy** and **Mary Pat Walsh**. And the astonishing actors: **Liz Bell, Lisa Benavides, Paul Butler, Nancy Chatty, Doc Dougherty, Alex Draper, Kate Forbes, Kevin Jackson, Peter Jacobson, Robert Jimenez, Alex Kranz, Florencia Lozano, Myra Lucretia Taylor, Peter Maloney, Sonia Manzano, Kathryn Meisle, Catherine Mueller, Jonas Oppenheim, Lenore Pemberton, Martha Plimpton, Armando Riesco, Diana Rojas, Shirley Rumierk, Jeanne Simpson, Phyllis Somerville, Marsha Stephanie Blake, Ray Thomas, Chris Welch** and **Joe Zarrow**. Many thanks to everyone. Let's do it again next year!

Teens Work With Dead Poet



Noel Polanco and Jennifer Jimenez make a "peep toast."

Ah Love! Ah Youth! Ah Poetry! Put 'em all together and whattya got? No, not bippity boppity boo. Ya got the **2003 Teen Ensemble Sonnet Scenes**, featuring ten adolescents collaborating with the greatest playwright of all time. It all began back in September, when the latest edition of the Teen Ensemble reconvened, after a two month hiatus, to kick off Year Two by getting cozy with the Bard. Each kid was handed one of Mr. Shakespeare's sonnets. Then they wrote a play inspired by the sonnet.

Rehearsals ensued, and the whole thing came to a stunning conclusion with a pair of performances on the first two days of March.

The show began at a bus stop, scene of **Noel Polanco's** *Go Fish*. Noel used rhyme and the help of a friend, played by **Jaya Rosado**, to get up the guts to call his love on his cell phone (Shakespeare loved cell phones). In **Anju Andre-Bergmann's** *Subservientus Ignoramus*, Anju solved her problems, as embodied by her sister (played by **Aisha Jabour**) with a little poison...in Aisha's teacup, that is (Shakespeare loved poison). **Matthew Jellison's** *Creative Will* put a gun in the hands of both a writer (Matt) and his alter-ego (**Osage Lewis-Ashley**). They opted for words instead of bullets (Shakespeare loved bullets). *One-Way Trip*, by **Jaylyza Rosado**, pitted two friends (Jaya and Anju) against each other; poetry didn't save the day, but it did bring a little love, peace and understanding. The first act ended with **Osage's** *High Skoo Chronicle*, which featured the rhyming of two poets, one a deceased Londoner, the other a 16-year-old New Yorker.

After an intermission during which all the old folks in the audience reminisced about how much fun they all had in adolescence, **Johnathan Roldan** cheered us up with his romantic comedy, *Chris and Lisa: The Loved Ones*, in which true love triumphed over all, including bad hair and smelly breath. That was followed by *One Girl Waiting*, **Aisha Lena Jabour's** otherworldly saga of not one, but two girls waiting. Just in case we might have forgotten, **Natalie Musteata** reminded us that love can go really wrong in her play, *White and Black*. **Mayleen Cancel** seconded that motion in her own "He done me wrong" drama, *Thy Love*. **Jennifer Jimenez** brought us back to square one as yet another unrequited type, finally pledging her love, this time over Easter candy, in *Jumping Giraffes In Monkey Soup, or Peeps* (Shakespeare loved peeps).

Many thanks to our favorite neighbors, the folks at **Women's Interart Annex**, and to our stage manager, **Erik Bowie**. Extra special thanks to our dramaturg/directors **Kate Marks, Catherine Mueller, Michael Bernard, Nancy Giles, Diana Rojas, Jeanne Simpson, Chris Ceraso, Josh Lewis** and **Cecilia Arana**. GR

Young Hoods Film Hood

Over spring break this April, while most kids were taking advantage of the opportunity to sleep in and play PlayStation 2, eight intrepid young filmmakers sacrificed their spring break at the altar of documentary truth, working overtime to seek out intriguing moments, images, ideas and people in Hell's Kitchen -- and capture it all on film. During the Project's BREAK IT UP!: VIDEO WEEK program, professional documentarians **Wendy Ettinger, Heidi Reinberg** and **Ben Kalina** instructed the group on how to operate digital video equipment, set up interviews, and monitor sound. The kids then split up into groups to comb the 'hood for their stories, with adult video savants **Jonas Oppenheim, Rick Meese, Leslie McCleave, Eve Morganstern, Lee Rosen, Ed Vassallo**

and **Noah Workman**. The raw footage was cut together with the help of experienced editors **Mona Davis, Adam Robinson, Rick Meese** and **Noah Workman**.

The results were three terrific shorts: **Octavia Rodriguez, Merlaine Mendez** and **Skye Blu Welsh's** controversial *Sacco's vs. Fat Sal's* confronted the neighborhood pizza debate head on. **Spencer Lopez, Zebulun Santiago** and **Alex Tomas** focused their lens on a friendly concierge at the Belvedere Hotel in the aptly titled *The Concierge at Belvedere Hotel*. Finally, *Harlo and Deshana*, by **Mordecai Santiago** and **Christopher Ramirez**, meditated on the experiences of two Project kids – 19-year-old **Deshana Hamid** and 10-year-old **Harlo Ulloa** and their views of Hell's Kitchen. The world premiere of the three pics was presented in a special screening at The Project on April 30th.



Merlaine Mendez, Octavia Rodriguez, and Skye Blue Welsh on location.

WENDY ETTINGER

Break It Up!: Video Week was made possible by generous loans of equipment from our adult volunteers, as well as from **Noel Dawkins** and **Prime Films**, and **Andrew Sherman**. We were all very sad when we had to give the cameras back to them! If anyone out there has digital video equipment that they're interested in donating to The Project, then we'd be able to do this kind of thing more frequently. Let us know! MSZ

All The Way to the Bank

It was a swell-egant mixture of gun molls, gangsters and upright citizens at the Project's annual party on Monday, May 12, 2003. The caper went under the moniker **HEIST SOCIETY, the Bank Job Benefit** at **CAPITALE**, which used to be known as the Bowery Savings Bank before **William Curran** and crew made the place glitter like gold. The nectar of the grape was supplied by **John Laird of Diageo Chateau & Estate Wines**.

Over 350 guests laughed uproariously until the riot police were called at the antics of **Mordecai Santiago, Solange Acosta, Alex Tomas, Anthony Mejia** and **Jazzy Hernandez**, who were abetted by the criminally funny **Oliver Platt, Lili Taylor, Roma Maffia, David Zayas** and **Mandy Gonzalez**. The cast then sang like canaries accompanied by percussionist **Anton Fig** and music director **Kari Riely**. The show was written by **Willie Reale** and **John Sheehy**, and was directed by **Jonathan Bernstein**. The set was designed by **Kevin Roach**, the lighting was by **Greg MacPherson**, the sound design was by **Scott Lehrer**, and the costumes were designed by **Crystal Thompson**. **Henry Krieger** wrote the song with Willie and the performance was stage-managed by the indomitable **Hank Meiman**.

The event was our biggest score to date. Especially helpful in making it that way were **Arthur Dantchik, Cathy Dantchik, Wendy Ettinger & Derek McLane, Louis & Patrice Friedman, Stephen Graham, Angelina Fiordellisi & Matt Williams, Cathy & Stephen Graham, Laura Valeroso, Jenny Wiener & Jon Steingart, Joanne Woodward & Paul Newman** and **Jeffrey Yass**. As the guests left, they made off with gift bags donated by **Entertainment Weekly** and filled by **Bourjois, Kenneth Cole Productions, Alison Fraser, Jive Records**, a division of the **Zomba Music Group, Newman's Own, Noggin, Scholastic Inc., Sesame Workshop, Tarte, Terax, John A. Vassilaros & Sons Coffee** and **Watkins Inc.** The event was also made possible in part by generous in-kind donations from **Stephanie Berger, Iris A. Brown, Capital Printing & Ron Kastner, Hudson Scenic Studios, The Printing Store** and **Wendy Stulberg**.

A Brief Smarticle

Hello, Projectiles! Liz Bell here. With the school year coming to a close, and summer break just around the corner, I'm happy to report that the 2002-2003 Homework Help and Smart Partners programs were a huge success! I have had so much fun working with such an amazing bunch of dedicated, creative, and, of course, smart kids and adult volunteers. I hope you all return in the fall for another fantastic year.



And one last thing. **Five**, the official literary magazine of The 52nd Street Project, is hot off the presses. Please stop by the Clubhouse for your very own copy, and an ice cream sandwich, too. Happy Summer! 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.

Bloomberg LP	\$5,000
Carnegie Corporation	\$50,000
Citigroup Foundation	\$10,000
Comedy Central	\$2,500
Entertainment Weekly	\$5,000
Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP	\$5,000
JKW Foundation	\$5,000
Kanbar Philanthropic Fund	\$5,000
Lloyds TSB	\$5,000
Lucille Lortel Foundation, Inc.	\$7,500
Ann M. Martin Foundation	\$5,000
Newman's Own	\$10,000
New World Foundation	\$2,500
St. James Church	\$4,000
Tobak-Dantchik	\$15,000
John A. Vassilaros & Son, Inc.	\$5,000
Wiener Family Foundation	\$30,000



The 52nd Street Project
500 West 52nd St., #2B
New York, NY 10019

We thought Sarah Kay took her role so seriously that she put on extra weight for her role in the March Playmaking show. Turned out it was all in the suit.

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Heather Carnduff-Gobbée

Occupation: Actor/Mother **Place of birth:** Walnut Creek, California **Habitat:** Brooklyn, New York.

What she does for the Project: Acts in plays and draws countless animals, signs and other props.

Why you do what you do: "Because I love people. I love figuring out why we do what we do and telling that story."

Hobbies: Drawing, reading and "going to the park with my son Phoenix and my husband Martin and playing 'Boo.'"

Most recent accomplishment: "Motherhood. It comes far ahead of the commercials I've done this year. More challenging, more rewarding."

Last Book Read: *Atonement* by Ian McEwan. "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix is on my nightstand. I'm getting over the fact that she stole my son's name."

Best 52nd Street Project Memory: "I remember watching a young boy named Jonathan watching the play he'd written. He was so small and his eyes were so wide. It was the most beautiful thing."

Advice to kids: "You really can be, and do, anything that you want, if you put your mind to it. You have to listen to yourself and trust in yourself and make it happen."

Favorite thing about the Project: "I love that it exists and that the kids choose to go there. Sometimes they have to make them go away because they want to stay so bad. It's a happy place in Gotham City."

On Flyer Bars: "I look forward to seeing Phoenix have his first sugar rush from a Flyer bar."



MARTIN GOBBÉE

I don't have a lot of room, so we'd like to extend big hearty welcomes to all the new members of the Project family and congratulations to their parents. In order of appearance: Jan. 10th –**Francesco Berrett** to **Julie Malloy & Dan Berrett**; March 11th – **Aidan John Esbjornson**, arriving on his due date to Proj. Costume Designer **Beth Clancy** and **David Esbjornson**; March 20 - **Cooper Alexander Hoffman** to OTHER Proj. costume designer **Mimi O'Donnell** and actor **Philip Seymour Hoffman** (there's gonna be some well-dressed babes at the park this summer). April 1st - **Sabina Foss Topol** to parents **Rich Topol** and **Eliza Foss**. This delighted **Sophia Ochs MacVittie** who shares this infamous birthday. April 9th - **Emma Dorothy Froelich** to **Cindy Kaplan & David Froelich**; May 2nd – **Tobias Bauman** to **Jessica Bauman & Ben Posel**; May 23rd – doubling the pleasure for **Lizzie Gottlieb & Michael Young** are **Oliver** and **Jake Young**. And finally, in just under the wire, June 15th - **Lino Munro Eisenberg** to **Ned Eisenberg** and **Patricia Dunnock**.

On to the matrimonial paragraph! **Katherine Freedman** and **Brian Beirne** were married on May 18. Katherine's memory of the event is spotty, but she recalls **Bernard Gersten** and **Cora Cahan** doing a well-known Jewish dance (In other words, Bernie and Cora danced the Hora). And we are thrilled to hear Neil Mazzella is engaged to be married – details to follow.

We were all pleased as punch to see our old pals **Willie** and **Rob Reale** on the Tony Awards. They were there because their show "A Year with Frog and Toad" was nominated for Best Musical. We were also mad as hornets when they didn't win! However, our tempers were cooled by the soothing colors on the dazzling Pucci dress that Willie's wife, **Jenny Gersten**, wore to the event. There's something about television that makes Pucci look even better than in real life. You may have noticed Willie surreptitiously tugging his ear to send a "hello" signal to his son Gus who was watching at home. Gus waved right back at the TV.

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