

PROJECT UPDATE

Volume 44; October, 2003

Editor: George R. Babiak

Yes, It Was "As We Like It"

Ain't life rough? This summer, while most New Yorkers were shaking out their umbrellas, some lucky stiffes were lounging and sipping champagne at a luxurious French chateau. Oh wait... that was us. In early July, ten teenagers ended their Project careers in style, touring their production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* in England and France. The cast included **Anju Andre-Bergmann**, **Mayleen Cancel**, **Aisha Jabour**, **Matthew Jellison**, **Jennifer Jimenez**, **Osage Lewis-Ashley**, **Natalie Musteata**, **Noel Polanco**, **Johnathan Roldan** and **Jaya Rosado**, along with adults **George Babiak**, **Chris Ceraso**, **Nancy Giles**, **Megan Sandberg-Zakian** and director **Michael Bernard**.

After a terrific yet sweaty premiere in New York City (in the un-air-conditioned **St. Clement's Sauna**, I mean **Theater**), the group flew to London where we were guests of **Harrow School**, a prestigious boy's academy whose alumni include **Winston Churchill**, **Lord Byron**, and **Spongebob Squarepants**. There we performed in their gorgeous new **Ryan Theater** for a discerning audience of Harrovians and Londoners. They seemed to approve of our treatment of the Bard. After a whirlwind tour of London (I remember something about **Westminster Abbey** and a play at **The Globe Theater**), we were off to France, where we found ourselves beside a working vineyard with two swimming pools, two tennis courts, and a vista of rolling green hills. Luckily, there was a show to perform so no one had the time to find a job or an apartment (otherwise, very few of us would have returned).

But return we did, with great tans, great pictures, and great command of iambic pentameter. Of course, in spite of the lingering Riviera daze, we recall that *As You Like It* was helped by many lovely people, including fight choreographer **Tom Schall**, acting coaches **Cecilia Arana**, **Catherine Mueller**, and **Larry Nathanson**, acting coach/choreographer **Jeanne Simpson**, and acting coach/musical genius **Josh Lewis** (see page 4 for more about Josh). The cast looked darn good thanks to costume designer **Wade Penhorwood** (who's not bad-looking himself). Lastly, and mostly, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our European hosts: **Martin Tyrrell** and company at Harrow School, **Hattie**, and **Bill Muddyman**, **Jane Muddyman-Heine**, **Jonathan Heine**, **Linda**, **Jean-Yves**, **Annie**, **Ellen** and everyone else at the **Chateau de Berne** in Lorgues, France. *Comme il vous plaisait!* MS-Z



(Most of) the "As You Like It" cast at Harrow School in London.

CRB

Fruits, Nuts, and Dates With Destiny

Five days after returning from the European tour, the Project staff herded a band of 10 kids and 10 adult volunteers overland (and oversea) to sunny Block Island, where we spent a week rehearsing our July set of One-on-Ones, long fated to be known as *Dates with Destiny: The Historic Plays*. How about that show at **Ensemble Studio Theater**? What? YOU MISSED IT?!?! And now you want a rundown? Sheesh! Well...oooooaaay.

Writer **Liz Flahive** took the "historic" part of the theme very seriously. Her play *Where's The Sooth In That?* took place in Britain in 2950 B.C.E. **Chassity Damiani** played the young girl who built Stonehenge (all true, says Liz). **Diana Rojas** was her lovelorn Druid pal. **Neena Beber** didn't go back in time, but she satisfied our stringent requirements by putting "history" in her title: *A Short History of an Odd Day*. **Crystal Toro** was a spunky inventor who teaches some cheerleaders to think. (No mean feat, that.) She was aided by the cheery **Florencia Lozano**.

Zebulun Santiago and **Jonas Oppenheim** were brothers coping with mind-numbing fear while fighting on different sides during the Civil War in Jonas' timely *Battlefield Blues*. In **Gus Rogerson's** *The Queen of Baseball*, **Merlaine Mendez** played a *real* character from history: **Lizzie "Spike" Murphy**, the first woman to play in a major league game. Gus was her hapless batboy. Closing the first half was **Michael Velez** as the unconvincingly viscious pirate **Buster McMean** and **Eris Migliorini** as **Captain Bonecruncher**. Eris wrote *Crew of Two*, which also featured teen counselor **Anju Andre-Bergmann** as their



Michael Velez and Eris Migliorini run each other through.

foe, Captain Anne Tennille, and intern **Melissa Jones** as Miss Polly Wogg (good names, eh?).

Moved by our opening play, our audience solemnly shuffled into the lobby to make offerings to **Tastus** and **Drinkme**, the Celtic gods of chocolate and bottled water. After a five-minute ceremony, they took their seats again to watch **Willie Reale's** *Two Gents of Whence*, a dizzyingly clever parody of Shakespearean wordplay featuring **Christopher Ramirez** and his adult chum **Victor Rojas**. In *Janet's Date with Destiny*, by **James Stevenson** (the brilliant illustrator of our flyer and program), **Christine Tomas** was a remarkably inventive cavegirl and **Dion Graham** was an elderly and suicidal woolly mammoth.

Next, **Nicole Fargardo** was a good girl who finds herself unjustly sharing a detention period with the delinquent **Bree Elrod** in *Who Died and Made You President?* by **Madeleine George**. In *The Yummy Mummy*, by **Erin Quinn Purcell**, **Skye Blu Welsh** and Erin donned khakis and thick British accents to raid an Egyptian tomb and encounter a living mummy (**George Babiak**).

Finally, **Harlo Ulloa** and **John Sheehy** revealed the angst of comic book superheroes confined to a single colorful box in *Panel Discussion*, written by John. One is tempted to say their performances were two-dimensional, but that would be cheap. (And we don't do cheap here!).

The whole shebang was rounded out by the assistance of a great creative support team: the music was by **Kim D. Sherman**, the costumes by **Crystal Thompson**, the lights by **Greg MacPherson**, and the sound by **Betsy Rhodes**. The highly unmanageable stage was somehow tamed by **Kelly Blackwell**. GB

History Repeats

According to **Karl Marx**, "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce." Shows how much *he* knows! The Project cut straight to the farce in *Second Dates With Destiny: The Historic Plays*; the Wareham Chronicles of the 2003 One-on-Ones held at EST in August.

After a great trip to the home of **Helen & Peter Randolph** on Buzzard's Bay in Massachusetts, (where son

Christopher led the effort to keep everyone fed) the company returned to NYC to fulfill its rendezvous with its audience. This new batch of distinctive dates began in the cradle of civilization with **Keira Naughton's** *The Rivals*, which pitted her Metaphoricus against **Britney Castro's** Descriptivus during the World Championship Poetry Battle. Then came **Erica Schmidt** as a *reinemachefrau* to **Mordecai Santiago**, playing that world-famous deep thinker and disco dancer, **Albert Einstein**, in Erica's *Bread Pudding*. Next, **George Babiak** and **Paul Dixon** played a pair of bicycle mechanic brothers on the verge of inventing manned, powered flight. No, not THOSE bicycle mechanic brothers, but the Kazmirchuks, just a little late for glory in George's *The Wright Stuff*.

On the set of a cheesy, silent film, **Octavia Rodriguez** was the diva accused of offing director **Gus Rogerson** and had to enlist the help of intellectually challenged production assistant **Saidah Arrika Ekulona** in **Melissa Gawlowski's** alluringly alliterative *Mimi Meets Her Match*. **Adam Felber's** *Vikings Rule* had **Jonathan Rosario** as the slightly unbalanced Torvald the Berserker and Adam as the less flamboyant Eric the Beige, and sent the audience out to the lobby jammin' the reggae anthem, "we Viking, we Viking, and Viking all day is what we like..."

The second act opened on Halloween as vampires **Alex Tomas** and our visiting Canadian playwright **Clem Martini** emerged from their crypt (and their dysfunctional relationship) in Clem's *A Very Private Practice*. Charging up next was the camel racing saga *Get Over The Hump* written by **Elizabeth Keiser** for **Steven Castellanos** as the grasping jockey to Elizabeth's beast of burden. History, gender-roles and astrophysics were all tweaked in **Theresa Rebeck's** *Galileo Meets the Pope*, featuring **Megan Cruz** as the heretical inventor and **Shirley Rumierk** as the pompous pontiff.



For better or verse: **Britney Castro** and **Keira Naughton**

You can't have too many plays about hungry people stranded in boats. That's why we welcomed **Matt Saldívar's** *Two Men In a Boat*, where he and **Isayah Muller** were the unfortunate crew of two. Hey, they weren't pirates or Vikings, right? **Michael Bernard's** *Spike and the Storyteller* told the story of a teller of tales, (**Michael Potts**) who encounters a girl, (**Amanda Santos**) who prefers tales told her way (i.e. with zombie bunnies).

The evening was well-noted by **Patrick Barnes**, dressed for success by **Crystal Thompson**, bounced off the sound board by **Vanessa Valdes**, managed to get by **Karen Munkel**, and shone in its best light by **Greg MacPherson**. JS

Dosey-Doe

For all of you young denizens of Midtown bemoaning how nothing ever changes at The 52nd Street Project, take heart. A change is gonna come. In fact, it's here.

It's the Two-on-Two's/Playback Flip-Flop. Allow us to explain: in the past, young Projectiles did the Two-on-Two's before Playback. Now they'll do it the other way around, see? To make this happen we'll do Playback twice this year, in the fall and then again in the winter, and not do the Two-on-Two's at all. Then next year (Fall 2004 and Winter 2005), we'll do Playback with younger kids and the Two-on-Two's with older kids. Confused? Drop by the Clubhouse for clarification. Ask for Gus. GR

Gifts and Grits

Picture the lushly appointed offices of **Ars Nova** filled with Project friends, family and kids, chatting and chowing down on some of the best soul food in town from **Sylvia's** all hosted by board member **Jenny Wiener** and her husband **John Steingart** – and then all these college age Project kids get a check. Got it? Then you have some idea of the good time had by all at the **Project's Annual Scholarship Party**.

Scholarship recipients qualify for scholarships by being a new student, or by being a returning student with a 3.0 grade point average or higher. This year's recipients are **Amy Barbosa** (John Jay College of Criminal Justice), **Jill Barbosa** (John Jay also), **Eddie Cooper** (Ithaca College), **Nyita Hanley** (SUNY, New Paltz), **Candy Godoy** (Cornell University), **David Harold** (New York Food & Hotel Management School), **Marsci Mysak** (Rochester Institute of Technology), **Diana Rojas** (La Guardia Community College), **Mary Vamvoukakis** (Marymount College of Fordham University), and **Sahara Walsh** (Hunter College). Thank you to all who attended or sent in donations, helping to make the party a huge success. JS

Let's Do the Choreography!

We knew **Dance Week** (Aug. 4-7) would be one of the toughest workshops in the **Break It Up!** series, the Project's newest program, which focuses on various art forms during school breaks. The plan was to have ten kids-- **Kamila Jacob**, **Merlaine Mendez**, **Suzette Santana**, **Mordecai** and **Zebulun Santiago**, **Alex**, **Christine**, and **Robert Tomas**, **Crystal Toro**, and **Skye Blu Welsh**—learn to dance like pros. But since the majority of the staff is as stiff as **Al Gore**, we enlisted the help of some of our volunteers who have a leg or two in the dance world. **Anita Flanagan** helped us from the initial planning all the way to the wildly successful final performance, which she directed; **Jeanne Simpson** led two days focused on ballet and Latin jazz; and **Victor Rojas**, our hip-hop expert, taught the kids some MTV-style moves. The kids were amazingly dedicated during the intense five-hour days, only occasionally caving into exhaustion and imagined physical injury. Thanks again to everyone who made it possible—including our neighbor, the **Women's Interart Annex**, for donating their space. WHAT A FEELIN'! LB

"Where Are They Now?" Department JOANNE RAMIREZ

If you've been wondering "What ever happened to Joanne Ramirez?" you're in luck because she stopped by the Project and gave us some info on her life.



Joanne was 12 when **Willie Reale** approached her in the Boxing Room at the Police Athletic League (the Project's first home) and asked her if she wanted to join up. "I hung out, loved it, and stayed." During her time with us she appeared in a play with **Pam Tyson** and wrote herself a very "serious and scary" show where she played a pregnant teen who has a daughter who also becomes a pregnant teen. Being "rather shy", she found it memorable.

Joanne attended St. Michael's Academy For Girls, and went on to college at SUNY/New Paltz, where she fell in love with teaching. As a student, she was a Resident Advisor. "I literally went from baby-sitting freshmen to rape counseling. I also did campus tours in order to afford living away from home." College was such a rewarding experience that she "would go back in a second."

Joanne started teaching in East Harlem and then moved on to a Special Education class in Washington Heights. "I had the neediest children." Although that was her second job, it was so hard that it felt like her first.

Joanne pulled through and she is now teaching at P.S.111, the very school she attended as a child. She is the First Grade Inclusion teacher. That means that half of her class are Special Ed kids and the other half are regular students. When we asked her what it's like to teach at her old school she said "It's weird because the children of my personal friends are in my class. It hits a little too close to home. But I love my kids."

Joanne gives credit to The Project. "It helped me become an accepting person because I was presented with different ideas. It made me work harder to not be stuck; it showed me that I could get out." Her parting words for kids: "Go to school, get your degree, because it's the one thing that no one can ever take away." DR



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.

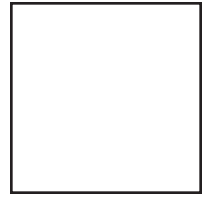
Armstrong Nickoll Family Foundation	\$1,500
Capital Research Company	\$15,000
Max & Victoria Dreyfus Foundation	\$20,000
Hennessy Foundation	\$10,000
Holland Lodge Foundation	\$4,000
New York State Council on the Arts	\$10,000

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



GRB

**Heroic Goodman and
The Raven Lunatic battle it out
in the July One-on-Ones.**
(see page 2).



JOHN SHEEHY

Josh Lewis

Occupation: 52nd St. Project Volunteer. "I also do a little writing, acting and teaching of my own. But that's just to kill time between Project shows." **Place of birth:** Madison, Wisconsin.

Habitat: Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, with Sarah Kay (known to Project audiences as Eve the Elephant). "It's good living with another Project Volunteer because when problems arise, we do what we learned volunteering in the Playmaking class. We go back and look at our "Character Profiles" and find the answers."

Why you do what you do: "I don't know how to do anything else."

Hobbies: "Eating good food, seeking out new and interesting places to eat good food and talking to people about where to go and eat good food."

Most recent accomplishment: "Being named Flyer Bar Profile Guy."

Last Book Read: *The Food Lover's Guide to Florence* by Emily Wise Miller.

Best 52nd Street Project Memory: "A dance party in the rain on Block Island comes to mind as does watching Johnathan Roldan's inspired performance as *The Slippery Eel*. And then there's the time I met a woman at the Replay picnic and then we moved in together. I think I better go with that one."

Advice to kids: "Be nice to George. (Note: This advice is not exclusive to Project kids. His powers know no boundaries)." **Credo:** "Oh, yea."

Favorite thing about the Project: "It kicks ass on everything. And it's the only place, outside of the privacy of my own home, where I get to be an Alien, a Caveman, a Pirate, a Figure Skater and an aide to George Bush. And sometimes, if you go away on one of the trips, you get lobster! It's ridiculous."

On Flyer Bars: "They're full of surprises. Just when you think you've settled on a favorite kind, (like the one with caramel and pecans, for instance) another one seduces you (like maybe the big dark chocolate bar or the crispy rice one) it's a never-ending love affair."

Babies are flying – and I mean that literally. We'd like to welcome two new jet setters to the Project family. In January, **Cleo Rebeck Lynn** flew in from Hefei, China with her delighted parents **Theresa Rebeck** and **Jess Lynn**. Her new brother **Cooper** had the joy of spending his 8th birthday fogged in at Beijing Airport while waiting to meet his sister.

On September 5, **Wen Hua Lea Trott-Herdrich** (see extremely cute photo at right) flew home from Changsha, China with her new family **Karen**, **Peter** and sister **Anna Trott-Herdrich**. It was rumored that Anna was busily employed as sister-entertainer and has perfected the three-point stroller turn.

Joshua Blackstone was born to project pals **Richard Blackstone** and **Yildez Yuksek** on August 13th at 11:45 p.m. Yup, right before the BLACK OUT. Can you imagine losing all power in the hospital less than 12 hours after you have given birth? That means no AC until the generators got back up. Doting dad Richard walked down numerous flights of stairs and walked 60 blocks to find his perspiring family a fan to cool them off. And let's not even think about the food situation. At least little Joshua didn't have to worry about that. We are waiting for some of Richard's hippest clients to "rapsodize" Joshua's story for **Zomba records**.



Alexander The Grant



Wen in Rome...uh, China.

Then there's the tale of **Alexander Mason Arana Grant**. Apparently, it's such a stirring saga that there's a movie in the can. The pic, known as *Alexander the Grant*, was produced by ProjVol **Cecilia Arana Grant** from a play by **Kevin Grant**. The premiere was held at 3:59 p.m. in New York City on July 29, 2003. To see the star, just look at the other cute picture to the left. (All this comes from the family press agent, ProjVol **Amanda Johns**).

Sick of babies? This just in: Old Project Pal **Julie Dretzin**, now of Los Angeles, pledged her troth to **Sam Catlin** on Sept. 21. **Willie Reale** affected a Yiddish accent to tell us: "It was a *niice* wedding and the feesh was good." CO

12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00 -- 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00