

Volume 48, Mərch, 2005

Editor: George R. Babiak



Two for the Books: Erin Quinn Purcell and Christopher Ramirez work on their homework in "My Friend is Not in the Yearbook."

One Good Turn

Right around the time the Boston Red Sox were winning their first World Series in 86 years, The 52nd Street Project was busy producing its own annual Fall Classic, our Playback show Nothing Up My Sleeve: The Deceptive Plays. It came to you live, courtesy of our friends at the Axis Theater in Sheridan Square, and featured the musical talents of composer and music director Loren Toolajian.

First up was a missed connection saga; Skyeblu Welsh acted her age in Uncertainty, as a teenager who was iffy about her feelings for a classmate played by Danny Goldstein. In the end, she decided she liked him, but she didn't "like him like him." They met again at their 50th high school reunion in Danny's answer play B.P.H.S. Revisited. Danny's character brought his torch but Skye's character was still doing the single "like you" thing. Next up was a robot saga. In both her play I.I.: Incredible Intelligence and in adult partner Megan Sandberg-Zakian's answer play O.I.: Opinionated Intelligence, Octavia Rodriguez played a wellmeaning android who, by reading the dictionary, learns to avoid ill-meaning owner/inventors like Evil Rose and Dr. Smile, as played by Megan. The rally was kept alive by Amanda Santos and her adult partner Malinda Walford with Amanda's play *Da Secret* and **Jolie Tong's** answer play *Da Lesson*. Our thespians went from a freshman year dorm room in the former to a royal castle in the latter, and belted out some fine tunes in the process. Current Project kid Kimani Lewis-Ashley and former Project kid Jed Clarke batted cleanup with Sandy Dream and Life Without Failure,

as a couple of Sandmen (as in "Mister...") who find that perfection is a drag.

Intermission, the theatrical equivalent of the seventhinning stretch, followed, and then we hit the heart of the order with When Wendy Meets Will and Who's Your Daddy? by young Isayah Muller and gracefully aging John Sheehy, respectively. Isayah played Sheriff Wendy Macdonalds, the long-lost father of John's character, Pirate Will Abominable. Or was he?...it seems we'll never really know. But we were certain that John's pirate costume, one of many fine get-ups provided by costume designer Naomi Wolff, was among the hottest ever seen on a Project stage. Moving on... to Love and Hate and Sister, Schizophrenia, the first penned by Britney Castro and the second by Liz Bell, in her Project playwriting debut (Britney, of course, was first produced by us at the turn of the century). Britney and Abigail Lopez played sisters working through some problems, like schizophrenia and celebrity. Last ups went to Christopher Ramirez and Erin Quinn Purcell, who followed tragedy with farce. My Friend Is Not in The Yearbook (because she's dead, I'm afraid), by Christopher, reminded us once again to just say no, while Erin's Lovelorn Jack and the Enchanting Violin: An Operetta in Three Acts reminded us once again to laugh through the tears.

M.V.P.'s include our weekend hosts Tom Duerdon and Xena Sheehan, the Rich family, Gene, Carol and Carmela Marner and our-man-in-Franklin Ed Vassallo; Greg MacPherson, a.k.a The Illuminator; stage manager Katie Ahern; and Maury Schott, a.k.a. Sound Guy. Thanks to all. One month to Opening Day! GR



The Comfy Costume Award: Jed Clarke and Kimani Lewis-Ashley as a

pair of Sandmen ..



A JOLLY HOLIDAY The Results of the 2004 Fundraiser Contest

Hello! Holly Deigh, your calendar girl, here. We received many good suggestions for who or what should be celebrated on February 4th in the Project's Celebrate This Contest. We also received many generous contributions, making this year-end fund raiser the most successful in the Project's history – giving the staff something to celebrate. Here are the lucky winners:

The \$25 Overlooked Historical Figure Day: NINTENDONDON DAY

In honor of: Nintendondon because without him parents would never have a free moment, 'cause kids would be bugging them all the time.

Possible Observances: All kids have a marathon Nintendo game day.

Jason Peterson Ridge, age 11

The \$50 Affliction Awareness Day: MEMORY-CHALLENGED AWARENESS DAY

In honor of: All those who come into a room and forget what they came for.

Because: ...what?

Possible Observances: Leave fly undone. "Forget" to do homework. Confuse important future employer with hot babe you were flirting with last night.

Cindy Lou Johnson & Nick Goodwin Self

The \$100 Notable Achievement Day: OYSTER EATING DAY

In honor of: The visionary/crackpot who first decided to open the shells & eat the bivalve inside. **Because:** No one in their right mind would ever do that.

Possible Observances: Besides eating oysters, go to woods or seashore and attempt consumption of previously heretofore unknown foodstuffs. The odder, the better.

Jenny Gersten & Willie Reale

The Any Amount Occasion: GRUDGE DAY

In honor of: Long-held grudges (and shorter ones, too).

Because: Some grudges are worth holding onto for life, like the U.S. vs. The French.

Possible Observances: Don't speak to anyone and don't explain why.

David Frankel

And our overall winner (who will be awarded dinner for two at BLVD) also comes from the Any Amount Occasion :

NATIONAL BOOGER DAY

In honor of: Boogers, of course.

Because: Everyone has them and most people just don't understand them.

Possible Observances: Booger bake-offs; Booger tosses; and of course, Booger picking.

Connie Grappo & Lee Wilkof

Honorable mention goes to Karin Schall for her unmentionable entry.

February 4th is also notably the birthday of **Jonathan Larson** and **Harry & Jackson Bernard**, so their families would naturally like you all to celebrate. Party on! *JS*



Wired for Sound: Ellen Foley and David Eigenberg played a microphone and a guitar in Carlos Dume's "The Miracle of Music."

Morph Fun Than We Imagined

Ah, Playmaking! Who doesn't love that first blush of creativity displayed by the Project's youngest members? This past December's batch of newbies journeyed to the little upstate N.Y. hamlet of Kripplebush to pen 10 original plays collectively titled *Morph for the Money: Plays with Change*.

Our make-believe curtain at Stage 36 rose on *The Life of Malibu and Fabulous Joe*, by **Amonson Pargas**. It featured **Bruce MacVittie** and **Kenajuan Bentley** as a pair of competing rappers who had more in common with **Lou Rawls** than **Ludacris**. Next, **Azalea Rosario's** *A Cubic Corzonicon Life* featured **Bryan Gmitter** as a groundhog who has developed a process for crushing golfballs into diamonds. **Danyon Davis** was the heavily-accented cat lover who schemed to acquire the technique. *The Miracle of Music* by **Carlos Dume** depicted the miracle of a guitar and a microphone staging a concert without the aid of musicians. Director **David Eigenberg** stepped in to finger-sync his riffs, but **Ellen Foley** definitely sang her own stunning solo. **Skyeblu Welsh**, as their mother, was a different drum.

As wild as the last two plays were, the evening's prize for surreality went to *The Big, the Small, and the Goofy,* by **Jason Gil**, which told the tale of a Giant Shark (**Peter Appel**) and a diminutive Bomb (**Mario Quesada**) who, curiously enough, squabble about their heights. **George Babiak** explored his Slavic heritage in this play by playing the part of a Russian Citizen. Then came *Why?*, **Catherine Fernandez's** account of a classic classroom rivalry. **Saidah Arrika Ekulona** and **Michelle Pawk** were the schoolgirls while **John Sheehy** made a most intimidating authority figure as the Principal.

Strange but true fact: turn on the lights in the middle of a show and the audience will mysteriously stand up, walk to the lobby, and babble meaninglessly until fed chocolate and herded back to their seats. It happens so often that we have dubbed this effect "Intermission."

The second half kicked off with *Trust*, written by Lilian Moore. In it, Dion Graham was Mr. Roy Whiskers, a lion who becomes the houseguest of a young girl played by Lucia Brawley. Like all people in distress, they consumed vast quantities of macaroni and cheese. Emmett Goodman-Boyd's play, *I Wish I had Something to Do*, starred

Christopher Randolph and **Florencia Lozano** as a boy and a girl who sing, dance, ride bikes, throw balls, hit each other with bats and play video games but are still inexplicably bored. The characters in **Lordan Ulloa's** *The Big Chase* were anything but bored since they were engaged in a titanic half-century-long pursuit. **Eddie Cooper** was the voracious Slime Monster and **Cecilia Arana** was the little girl he sought to devour.

Everyone loves a good show about a girl struggling to make it big in show biz and **Krystal Vega** delivered it in *For All Those Years*. **Catherine Mueller** was the ingenue and **Maile Holck** was the hard-hearted producer who turned out to be a long-lost sister. The final show was the wistfully atmospheric *Trees and Snow* by **Samantha Toro**. **John Conlee** was a forlorn and not-too-bright man of snow while **Melissa Jones** played a fashion-conscious evergreen.

Yep, it was a great show, and it was made all the better by these adult dramaturg/directors (in show order): Sascha Paladino, Denise Burse, David Eigenberg, Peter Jay Fernandez, Jessica Bauman, Maria Goyanes, Emmy Grinwis, Charlie Tocantins, Liliana Amador, and Gus Rogerson. Thanks also to Greg Macpherson for lighting, Sarah Wynne for stage managing, Maury Schott for sound, Joel Derfner for composing great songs, Patrick Barnes for playing them live, and Crystal Thompson's fabulous Metropolitan Opera Design Squad for the costumes. They were Munee Hayes, Vicki Jo De Rocker, Debbie Lucas, Stephanie Biear, Scott Coppock, Marit Aagaard, and Cathrine Piper.

Oh, yes, let's not forget our Kripplebush hosts: Joe White and Iris Brown (who also cooked!), Steve Buscemi and Jo Andres, Tim Guinee and Hallie Foote, Laura Shaine Cunningham, the Miles family, Mary Louise Wilson, Nicole and Paul Quinn, and Deborah Freedman and Bill Woods. May they never Morph. GRB

2-on-2's Stage Triumphant Comeback

After a year off, the 2-on-2's returned this past January with the appropriately titled And We're Back! The Return of *the 2-on-2's*. A company of 12 young actors and 6 directors journeyed upstate in January to the glorious home of Maria Tucci (see her profile on Page 6). Between exciting sessions of bowling, skating, sledding, eating and the game of "Celebrity," the group also managed to rehearse some plays. The resulting show thrilled audiences at the Women's Interart Annex with some top-notch singing,



ARAM KAILIAI

Katie Grullon and Kamila Jacobs cry out for potatoes.

dancing, and, of course, root beer floats.

David and Manny opened the show (and it seemed that author **Michael Bernard** kicked off a titling trend – stay

tuned), directed by Michael Baron. Eddie Cuevas was a former race car driver who'd lost his nerve (on Dead Man's Curve) and Alex Tomas was his faithful grease monkey. Both, strangely, seemed to be uncommonly good at 80's dance moves. In Madeleine George's More Potatoes, More!, agent Kamila Jacobs and opera composer Katie Grullon battled for creative control (though in reality, control belonged to director Kim Sykes). Their conflict was resolved in a glorious operatic finale which made excellent use of the word "spud." Next up, Zebulun Santiago played an exceptionally short giant and his pal Nicole Fargardo was an exceptionally klutzy fairy (Keira Naughton's script was titled, of course, The Giant and The Fairy.) Together they slayed a freakin' dragon (scarily voiced by director Ed Vassallo), and everyone went chuckling off to the lobby for intermission.

Don and Dean, by Ping-Pong great Josh Lewis (see page 5), continued the evening's hilarity (and concluding the "Noun and Noun" title trifecta) by casting Mark Gamero and Michael Velez as best friends who really, really did not see eye to eye about how to throw a surprise party. Cameos by crew guru Charlie Tocantins and his underlings (intern Rebecca Grieg and kid helpers Octavia Rodriguez and Stephanie Vamvoukakis) helped make the party surprising indeed. Liz Flahive drew on the theme to pen Don't Call *it a Comeback,* directed by **Megan Cramer**, about a lost rock star (Joshua Joya) and a slightly less lost turtle (Megan Cruz). LMNOP Negative (written by Willie Reale and directed by Megan Sandberg-Zakian) closed out the evening with a bang - or perhaps it was some other, equally loud, sound. In any case, Katherine Acosta played a woman with a rare blood type and **Evelyn Nicole Rosario** was her really, REALLY annoying hospital roommate – and proud of it.

This great set of shows would have been neither seen nor heard without our deities of light and sound, **Greg MacPherson** and **Vanessa Valdes**, and our intelligent, beautiful, and really nice stage manager, **Erica Schmidt**. All the show stopping music was composed by **Joel Derfner** and played by **Doug Nervik**; costumes were created by the stylish **Lora LaVon**. We're also grateful to our weekend hosts: the ever-gracious **Maria Tucci**, and her neighbors **Lili Taylor** and **Fisher Stevens**. *MSZ*



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.

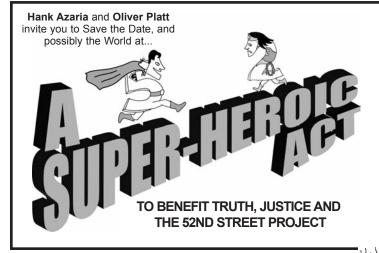
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Care to Lend a Hand?

Project Update is choc-a-bloc with adults helping kids in all kinds of creative and excitingly theatrical ways. However, there are many other mundane, but no less important, areas in which we desperately need help. Here is a list of the jobs that make us go scrambling for **volunteers** time and again. If you'd like to pitch in, give George, our Production Manager, a call at the Clubhouse (212) 333-5252.



- Stage Managing
- Costume Design
- Sound Design
- Backstage crew
- Load-ins and light-hangs (always on Mondays)
- Drawing and coloring props and slides



Be a Hero, already!

Have you ever bounded through your apartment with a bath towel tied around your neck? Ever jumped off a chair while yelling "Up, up, and away?" Of course you have! Well, now's your chance to be accepted into the pantheon of true superheroes, namely, people who support The 52nd Street Project.

On **Monday, May 9th** crimefighters from all over the globe will be convening at the stylish **Capitale** on Bowery and Grand. The invitation's going in the mail in April, but there's no reason to wait for it. Just call **John "The Thing" Sheehy** at **(212) 333-5252** to book your seats.

Rebecca Grieg, our intern from England, enjoying a brush with fame.



Mejia and Lewis



Sheehy and Butler

Tocantins and Silva

Velez and Daniel

Ping-Pong Players Collect Bling-Blong

Picture, if you will, a small white globe of translucent plastic suspended in space over a perfectly smooth green field. Just 40 millimeters in diameter and 2.4 grams in weight, the sphere is smaller than a meatball and lighter than a penny. Nevertheless, it is the epicenter of gargantuan forces and the focal point of a hundred unblinking eyes.

I refer, of course, to any split-second on Friday, February 18th during the final match in the 5th Annual Smart Partners Ping-Pong Doubles Tournament. That cataclysmic battle pitted last year's champions, Adrian Zambrano and Carol Ochs, against Anthony Mejia and Josh Lewis, a pair of challengers playing together for the first time. For a time the game appeared to be going the way of the champs, but Mejia and Lewis played with such cool aplomb that even the mighty Ochs was felled. Mejia and Lewis took the first place trophy home with a score of 22 to 20.

You may think, dear reader, that I write this piece with characteristic Project tongue-in-cheekitude. Not so! It really was that exciting! No less than 23 adult/kid teams competed for the foamcore trophies and some sweet prizes donated by MTV (thanks, Shirley Rumierk, for scoring those shirts, bags, and books!). The event, refereed by eagle-eyed Ed Vassallo, ran for nearly 4 hours. As they waited for their matches, the players dined on chicken wings and french fries and played in special Nok-Hockey exhibition matches. The Nok-Hockey trophy was taken home by Mark Gamero just for beating Gus **Rogerson** more than anyone else.

In addition to the 1st and 2nd Place Ping-Pong winners already mentioned, 3rd place was seized by Jeremy Butler and John Sheehy, long-time players thrilled to be entering the standings for the first time. 4th place was captured by Angel Silva and newcomer Charlie Tocantins. Also entering the Project Ping-Pong Ball of Fame are Michael Velez and Perry McBain Daniel, who received Honorable Mention for their skillful teamwork, and kid players Katherine Alvarez and Aladino Olivares, who were awarded Best New Player medals.

First to be ousted, but far from last in the hearts of the fans were Jonathan Rosario and Erica Schmidt, who were presented with the Good Sport awards for losing with great grace as well as supporting the other players until the very end. They also get special credit for their snappy matching powder-blue warm-up suits! GRB



Schmidt and Rosario

Liz to Vols "I need you!"

Playing in the annual Smart Partners Ping-Pong tournament is only one of the many rewards of being a mentor or tutor to a Project kid! If you have an hour and a half a week to lend, we may have the perfect kid for you to spend it with. Smart Partners and Homework Helpers come to the Clubhouse to assist kids with homework assignments, learn a new art form together, take a field trip to a cool place or event in the city, or just to hang out! We are always seeking dedicated, creative and enthusiastic adults to volunteer for The 52nd Street Project's education programs. If you are interested, please contact me to learn more and to receive a volunteer application: Liz Bell, Director of Education, (212) 333-5252, bell@52project.org. LB



Janiece Aponte and her Smart Partner Chrysti Eigenberg work together on a botanical experiment.





NENDY STULBERG

Məriə Tucci

Occupation: Actress and occasional wintertime cook for the Project.

Why she does what she does: "I have no idea."

Habitat: Upper East Side and Clinton Corners, New York.

Hobbies: "I love to cook and garden."

- **Most recent accomplishment:** Appeared in multiple roles in *The Downtown Plays*, the inaugural offering of the Tribeca Theater Festival.
- Last book read: "Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown to Lizzie Gottlieb's and her husband Michael Young's twin boys." Lizzie is her daughter and Michael is her son-inlaw. They're both Projectiles, too, by the way.

What she does for us: Acts in our shows and benefits and hosts our Two-on-Two trips at her home upstate every January.

- Best 52nd Street Project Memory: "Of course it's any role I have ever done at the Project -- be it animal, vegetable or mineral."
- Favorite thing about the Project: "I have a fond memory of certain costumes..."

On Flyer bars: "Highly nutritious and an essential part of everyone's daily diet. Ignore your parents and your dentist. What do they know?"



Here you have Grace Magdalena Belgrader, who somehow managed to procure a jaunty cap right after emerging from the womb. This 8 lb., 12 oz. cutie was born Dec. 23, 2004 to Caroline Hall and Andrei Belgrader.



Elijah Morris

Nelson, third son of Proi

Pals Tim Blake Nelson

is seen here in the small

rocket that brought him

from the planet

Zibbelknyx.

and Lisa Benavides.

(also little brother to

Henry and Teddy), arrived on this world on November 29, 2004. He



◄ Gwendolyn Claire McNamara is the daughter of Mona Arriola McNamara, one of our ace light hangers, and Whitney McNamara. Gwen made her debut on January 3, 2005. She's all tuckered out here from hanging her toy lights on the grid over her crib.

► This little handful is young Otho Valentino Sella, the child of Robert Sella and Enid Graham. He showed up on Jan. 12 and was bigger than he looks here: 8 lb., 15 oz.!



▼ Enough babies! Our old pal Camilia Sanes moved to L.A. a while ago. Now she's engaged to Daniel Chisholm, a hot-shot video game producer who's not too hard to look at, either.



► Crystal Thompson, the Countess of Costumes, is finally tying the knot with her long-time beau Chris Ryan. Don't worry! He's royalty, too, being one of our Lords of Light and Sound.



▲ At left, Elijah Theodore Horland and his mom Soojin. His dad, Project computer whiz Jeremy Horland, is behind the lens. Eli was born at Columbia Prez on Jan. 11.

 Say hello to former ProjKid Tessa John-Connor's son.
She brought the litlle nipper in to the Clubhouse for a visit and we all agreed that he is stinkin' cute.



Picture-free Dept.: Long-time Project supporters Ron Kastner and his wife Vanessa are the proud new parents of Jessica, born last June in London. All three are back in NYC now...ProjVol Lucia Brawley and Peter Macon will wed on Oct. 16. Peter popped the question in Minneapolis on Christmas Eve. Strangely enough, he was playing Oedipus at the time. Readers are free to draw their own psychological inferences...Loyal fans Brian Mertes and Melissa Kievman got married this past Sept. 5. They now share an anniversary with George Babiak and Vanessa Valdes...Shockingly late-breaking news: Robert Jimenez and his wife Robin brought Anya Graciela Jimenez into the world on February 10, 2004.



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INSIDE: THE SPRING EDITION OF...



WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

PLAYS TO THINK ABOUT: THE SPRING 2005 PLAYMAKING SHOW

KID PLAYWRIGHT

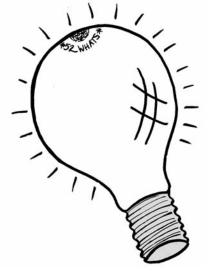
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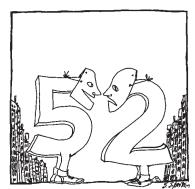
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BICK MEESE MABTIN MOBAN SARAH PETERSIEL NIKKI PHILLIPS KABI BIELY MATT SALDIVAR LIZA STEINBERG JOE WHITE ... AND MORE!





The 52nd Street Project

The 52nd Street Project is a non-profit organization that brings children of the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood together with professional theater artists to create original shows. "What's the BIg Idea: Plays to Think About" is a production of our Playmaking program, in which children are taught how to write plays. After nine weeks of classes, each child is given two adult actors, a theme, and a dramaturg/director who helps him or her through the writing of a play during a weekend in the country. The Playmaking classes were adapted for the Project by Daniel Judah Sklar from his book Playmaking: Children Writing and Performing Their Own Plays.

The Playmaking Program is made possible by public funds from many corporations, foundations, individuals, and the New York State Council on the Arts (a state agency), and the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs.







Cut flyer out and affix to fridge or forehead