



# 52 PROJECT UPDATE

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## FACING THE WEATHER IN BLOCK ISLAND

The weather on **Block Island** is hard to predict. A foggy morning can lead to a sunny afternoon, only to have a hurricane blow in before you can get your swimsuit on. Frustrating, perhaps, but it was the perfect site to kick off the 2007 One-on-Ones: *RAIN OR SHINE: The All Weather Plays*. In the One-on-Ones, we pair up ten kids aged 10-12 with adult partners to perform short plays written by the adults. This year, we whisked 'em all to Block Island for a week of rehearsal, great food, and fun, and then returned to New York to perform them at the Ensemble Studio Theatre on July 20-22. If plays were weather patterns, these ones would be hurrizzarnados! You know, the good kind.

Leading off the show was *Myth Direction*, by **John Sheehy**. John was Prometheus, an unlucky Titan chained to a rock for all eternity. His unlikely hero was the mighty Hercules (**Laron Holt**), who freed him after a short lesson on justice, mercy, and of course, rock-smashing. Next up was *So Irritating* by **Diana Rojas**, in which Diana and **Jamie Yip** played a pair of scientists struggling to find a cure for the most annoying of shiny-plant-related disorders... POISON IVY! The audience's excitement reached class 5 when **Matt Sincell** and **Carlos (C.J.) Muentes** took the stage for **Carlo Alban's** *Whether the Weather*. In this apocalyptic vision, catastrophic weather changes force humans to stay in their houses. Julian (C.J.) and his brother Dom (Matt) venture out onto a flooded earth and realize that things are only as bad as you make them.

In *Plains Janes*, by **Reg Flowers**, **Breanna Straker** played Savana, a discontented performing cheetah who wants to live a life outside the big top, and must therefore convince her fame-hungry trainer, Baretta, (**Nana Mensah**) to let both of them see the world and live free. Closing out the first act was another **Michael Bernard**-written opus entitled *Gimme Some Space*. **Andy Reyes** and **Tim Cain** played two all-star space cadets who become marooned in deep space. They overcome their bitter rivalry and collective annoyingness to temporarily admit that they hate each other a little less.

At this point, an eye in the theatrical hurricane gave the audience time to tear through the lobby in search of delicious **Flyer Bars**. Back in the theater, they witnessed a deluge of witty banter in **Willie Reale's** *Truth Over Lunch*. **Ed Vassallo** played a mobster who tries to deceive the cutest mob boss in existence (**Hashem Hamed**). Then came a maelstrom of anger management in **Liz Tuccillo's** *Oh, I Don't Think So*, in which therapist Marci Mild (**Luisa Santiago**) had to quell a tempest of rage from a spoiled celebrity known as Naomi Handfull (**Lauren Blumenfeld**), while learning to balance patience and passivity. But the anger didn't end there, because the next play, *Citizen Dog*, by **Liz Flahive** (see p. 3 for some more interesting news about Liz) unleashed a political battle of dirty tricks and back-biting between a Presidential hopeful (Liz) and her extremely ambitious pooch, Spot (**John Cacomanolis**).

The snow really hit the fan in *A Hard Snow's A-Gonna Fall* by **Josh Moody**, in which Josh and **Ethan Maldonado** played two brothers who become stuck in a mountain cabin after a bullhorn accident results in a catastrophic avalanche. The two finally deal with their fraternal disputes and learn to love each other through Scrabble™. The evening closed with a dry spell... seriously! In **Adam Felber's** *The Rainmaker*, two sisters (**Claudia Zelevansky** and **Doris Alcantara**) strive to save the world from a deadly, post-apocalyptic drought, dealing with angry mobs, snake-man mutants, and of course, a light dusting of sibling rivalry along the way.

Helping us all weather the storm were composer **Kim Sherman**, costume designer **Ciera Wells**, Goddess of Sound **Vanessa Valdes**, light designer **Greg MacPherson**, stage manager **Charles M. Turner III** (we call him "Chuck") and our charming intern **Brigid Gannon**. Extra special thanks go out to our incredible group of host families: **Roberta & Alan Alpert**; **Sue Black**; **The Homans Family**; **Josie Merck & Jim Stevenson**; **Jane Scranton**; **Jennifer & Elliot Taubman**; **Ron & Judy Tierny**; **Martha Velie-Gass & Pat Ritter** (who were also our fabulous chefs); **Joya Verde & Virginia Dare**; and our headquarters host **Dr. Christina Biaggi**. Without them, we would literally have been left out in the storm.

JAM

*The Block Island Teams, top to bottom, at left: Laron and John, Diana and Jamie, Matt and Carlos (C.J.), Breanna and Nana, Andy and Tim, Ed and Hashem, Lauren and Luisa, Liz and John, Josh and Ethan, and Claudia and Doris.*

## BRAVING THE ELEMENTS IN WAREHAM

A plethora of meteorological phenomena beset us as we spent a week rehearsing and playing in sunny, foggy, rainy, windy, stormy, snowy (okay, maybe not snowy) Wareham, Massachusetts for our August batch of One-on-Ones, which had the same well-weathered theme as the Block Island set. Fortunately, we were sheltered by the ever-sunny Peter, Helen, and Christopher Randolph and a host of host families, including Kitty Benton, Wendy & Kevin Brogioli, Emily & John Morgan, Sidney Worthen & David Pearce, Gray & Rose Watson, Joe McNay and the entire McNay family (who allowed us to use their spacious boathouse for our rain-drenched Wareham performance day).

Back in New York, the show began with a bang as two *Mad Scientists* competed to solve the maddening problem of global warming. Written and directed by Christopher Randolph for Emmett Goodman-Boyd, these two singing scientists pulled their hair out in frustration until they realized that their issues actually fell under the same umbrella. It was a dark and stormy night when Gilda Gaines, *Girl Detective* walked onto the scene of the crime. Though only 11 years-old, Kimberly Zenteno proved one tough cookie who was able to dupe the diamond crook and close the case in this noir-ish mystery written and directed by Beatrice Terry. Next up was *In the Garden*, written by Kate Ryan. In this outdoorsy play, Marsha Stephanie Blake was a caterpillar who meets a flower named Dahlia played by Mari Ulloa. As the clouds shift, their unlikely friendship survives a frightening storm and Caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly.

*The Wrong Bus*, written and directed by Reg Flowers for Jazmine Mikell reminded us that everyone needs a fright, now and then. And fright certainly was delivered when a sassy bus driver (Jaz) and her wayward passenger (Reg) get lost in the fog and discover a haunted farm house. Monsters, sinewy tentacles, jaws of death, and slimy hands all try to destroy them, but they escape unscathed—and just a little bit braver. Armando Cosme, Jr. and Megan Cramer wrestled with their own kind of monster in Megan's *Wrestling with Interest*. In it, two nerdy accountants get in the ring to fight when the real pros are delayed in an airport. They battle it out with fierce one-eyed opponents, played by Kayelani "Half-nelson" Silva and Jonathan "Scorpion-hold" Dent. You'll never believe who won!

Opening the second act was a wicked scary play written and directed by George Babiak for Marlowe Mendez. Ectoplasm and tartar sauce mingled in *The Specter Detectors* as two Boston con artists come face-to-face with a real live—and hungry—apparition, played by the ghostly Lily Howard. Different dangers were faced in *The Great Discovery*, written by Cindy Lou Johnson and directed by Adriana Gaviria for Aleyni Aguilar. Aleyni played a diva who reluctantly agrees to go rock climbing with her adventurous buddy. Together they weathered the slick glaciers and craggy ice caps, one little step at a time. Poetry reigned (rained?) in *Cyrano: the Blues are Back*, written by Bruce MacVittie and directed by Patrick Jones for Tino Paduani. Patrick played the vain and foppish Christian who loves Roxanne, played by the very loveable Johanna Vidal. His only hope of wooing her is the flowery verse of the large-nosed and large-hearted Cyrano, played by Tino. There was nary a dry eye in the house.

In *Out to Sea*, written and directed by Tonya Canada, a feisty dolphin (Samantha Caldon) and a crotchety hammerhead shark (Tonya) have conflicting plans for their retirement. Finally, the evening ended with Craig Cox's arresting drama *Good Cop, Bad Cop*. Howard Overshown and Maximo Jimenez played the title roles with John Sheehy as the shady suspect. The lawmen tried switching roles with hilarious results, but were still able to extract the confession they wanted.

Everybody sang songs with music penned by Patrick Barnes, and wore clothes for all climates designed by Katherine Brown. Our stage was ably managed by Karen Munkel, our sound was provided by Drew Vanderburg, and our illumination was arranged by Greg MacPherson. Through all the rain, everyone shined.

MC

## TEENS TAKE TEXAS

Two years are an eternity in the life of a teenager. Twelve of our latest teens succeeded in bridging that chasm by presenting their final 52nd Street Project Teen Ensemble production, William Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, in July, 2007. To prepare for the show, Christian Alvarez, Megan Cruz, Nicole Fargardo, Mark Gamero, Kamila Jacob, Joshua Joya, Ani Kehr, Anthony Mejia, Nikki Rosario, Zebulun Santiago, Alex Tomas and Adrian Zambrano underwent 19 rigorous months of acting classes, workshops, text exploration, public presentations, and an intense final rehearsal schedule. New York audiences were riveted at a pair of performances at The Barrow Group's TBG Theater here in Manhattan. Then we set off for Marfa, Texas, a renowned bastion of art and creativity in the Lone Star State.

At right, the Wareham Teams: Christopher and Emmett, Kimberly and Beatrice, Mari and Marsha Stephanie, Reg and Jazmine, Megan and Armando, George and Marlowe, Adriana and Aleyni, Patrick and Tino, Samantha and Tonya, and Howard and Maximo.



DAVID FURR

**Tim and Lynn Crowley**, who hosted the thrilling week in the Wild West, described the welcoming Texas town's excitement about our visit as if the teens were "Rock Stars" and that is the treatment the gang received. Our high desert adventure included star-gazing at **McDonald Observatory**, swimming in **Balmorhea State Park**, a tour of colossal art installations at **The Chinati Foundation**, and horseback riding through the mountains in nearby **Fort Davis**. The week ended with a final performance of *R & J* at the **Goode-Crowley Theater**.

On our final night in town, our kids shared some of their thoughts and feelings. "This trip has changed my life." "I love meeting new people and having new experiences." "I don't want to go back to subways and skylines!" Everyone was deeply moved by the experience.

Project staffers **Megan Cramer**, **Reg Flowers** and Teen Dean **Chris Ceraso** guided The 52nd Street Project Teen Ensemble through their amazing two-year journey. The intrepid **Patricia McGregor** stage managed the production and accompanied us on the tour. **Cicely Berry** of **The Royal Shakespeare Company** put the teens through their paces in a two-hour workshop. **Kate Cusack** and **Jennifer Jimenez** were a huge help as our costume consultants while **Greg MacPherson** designed our lights.

The 52nd Street Project would like to thank Tim and Lynn for hosting and **Frances McDormand**, **Eric Karpeles** and **Mike Sell** for championing Marfa as a destination. A Texas-size helping of thanks go to **Ree** and **Jason Willaford**, **Kate Hunt**, and **Evelyn Luciani** for their help in making the Marfa trip an incredible success. *RF*



*A Marfa-lous Time: The Teens take the stage in Texas.*

MEGAN CRAMER

## MEGABITS

▼ Projectress **Jennifer Ostrega** and **Daniel B. Gold** got hitched on June 24. Although she only married one man, she had two wedding dresses ready to go. The spare is now in the Project costume shop.



▲ We put another picture of **Liz Flahive** and **Jeff Cox** in Megabits because that's the Very Rev. **Willie Reale** doing the officiating on Sept. 8! It seems you can get ordained on the web real cheap.

► If you're a fan of the Vows column in the New York Times, you've already seen this spectacular picture of **Sascha Paladino** and **Erin Torneo**, who got married in Mystic, CT on July 21. According to the article, Erin has published a book about how women can survive the "all-my-friends-are-getting-married" years. Obviously, the solution is to join 'em!



THOMAS McDONALD FOR THE N.Y. TIMES

► Newly engaged are Project Vol **Esra Gaffin** and **Kuroesh John Dayani**. Kory, as he is usually known, proposed to Esra in an East Village community garden by playing a special song of love for her through earphones, dropping to one knee, and then presenting his grandmother's ring to her. Awwwww!



► Meanwhile, Board Member **Jenny Wiener** and her husband and Ars Nova partner **Jon Steingart** welcomed young **Ruby Steingart** into their family. Older brother **Leo** demonstrated a truly unique nature by welcoming his baby sister with delight and open arms.



◀ Here are **Peter Bernstein**, **Erin Quinn Purcell**, and their big new baby boy **Bruno Levon Bernstein**. Erin reports: "He was born on Aug. 2 at 5:48 in the a.m. 10 lbs., 6 oz. - by far the biggest boy (or girl) in the nursery that day! That week! Maybe even that month! The head nurse joked to Daddy: 'Congratulations! You have a toddler!'"



◀ And those who don't have babies? Well, they go scuba diving. (Don't they look blissful?) Seen here are newly certified divers **Tom Schall**, **Karin Schall**, **Kim Sherman**, and staffer **John Sheehy**. In August they went to Curacao with fellow New York Dive Rats (as they named their club) **George Babiak**, **Vanessa Valdes**, **Jeff Potter** and **Anita Flanagan**.

ECP

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**Adventure Week**

This July, as a mini-Break-It-Up, we braved the rapids of the Central Park Row Boating Lake, faced a menagerie of animals for Cartoon Day, and experienced kid-choreographed dances at the Young Dancemakers Company recital. A grand adventure was had by all. Seen below are Captain **Rafael Irizarry III**, intern **Jonathan Dent**, motorman **Ethan Maldonado**, and ballast **Liz Bell**.



GRB



GRB

**NANCY GILES**

**What she does for the Project:** Nancy has been a Project actor and director since 1988.  
**Occupation:** Actress, writer, voiceover person, and commentator on "Sunday Morning" on CBS.  
**Why she does what she does:** "It makes me happy and I'm lucky enough to make a living at it."  
**Place of Birth:** Queens, New York.  
**Hobbies:** "Watching classic films, TV, and '24,' staring into space."  
**Habitat:** Weehawken, N.J.  
**Last book read:** "*Harriet The Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh. I was going to give you some intellectually stimulating title that I should be reading, but truth is truth. *Harriet* always inspires me."  
**Most recent accomplishment:** "Actually took an eight-day vacation to Italy -- my first vacation in six years."  
**Best 52nd Street Project Memories:** "Stitching Kevin Geer's head with a foamcore needle in Dale Fetterman's *The Boxer and The Dancer*, shortly before George Babiak (Kevin's opponent) was hit and George spat out his foamcore teeth. A stunning moment in a sweet play."  
**Credo:** "'Do as I say, not as I do,' because I'm always messing up."  
**Advice to kids:** "School counts. Read and write as much as you can. Communication is key!"  
**Favorite thing about the Project:** "The faces of the Project kids. When they're thinking of an idea, or acting in a play, or joking around with each other, or writing, or getting minutes, or performing Shakespeare for the first time. Their faces are amazing."  
**On Flyer Bars:** "The milk chocolate caramel Flyer Bar is a chewy piece of heaven."



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.

- BRENNER FAMILY FOUNDATION . . . . . \$15,000
- CARNEGIE CORPORATION . . . . . \$75,000
- WILLAM & MARY GREVE FOUNDATION . . \$15,000
- HOLLAND LODGE FOUNDATION . . . . . \$4,000
- NYS CA . . . . . \$10,500
- TONY RANDALL THEATRICAL FUND . . . \$10,000
- TIGER BARON FOUNDATION . . . . . \$10,000

**SO YOU THINK YOU'RE PRETTY SMART, EH?**

**PROVE IT! MENTOR A KID IN THE PROJECT'S "SMART PARTNERS" PROGRAM.**

Meet with a kid once a week to help with homework, read together, write creatively, play ping pong, or go on field trips... the possibilities are endless!

**OR JUST BE A HOMEWORK HELPER!**

This is a more flexible drop-in program that happens every day at the Clubhouse.

**CONTACT LIZ BELL FOR DETAILS.**

Call (212) 333-5252

or send a note to bell@52project.org.

(By the way, you don't have to be all *that* smart.)



GRB

Smart Partners **Terrence Mack** and **Tim Cain** demonstrate the fine art of fun on the "Watermelon," the Project's tandem bike.