



PROJECT UPDATE

ISSUE #95 ● APRIL, 2025 ● GEORGE BABIAK, EDITOR

We've had a very nice winter of producing here at the Project, and we'd like to start our recap of the season with a look at *To The Moon: Plays That Blast Off*. We presented this Playmaking show Dec. 13-15, 2024 at our own **Five Angels Theater**. If you're new to the Project, Playmaking is where brand-new members, aged 10 or so, write plays that are performed by adult professional actors, a recipe that's always a crowd-pleaser.

1. In *Wishes*, by **Ishi Saint Louis Taveras**, art student **Jose-Maria Aguila** bought art supplies with his dad's credit card, shocking his deli-owner sister, **Natalie Woolams-Torres**. **Garrett Kim** dramaturged and **Steven Stocking** directed.

2. **Lynne Rosenberg** was a ghostly pianist and **Nick Mills** a singing mop in **Matilda Weidner's** *Ghostly Music*, which was directed by **Ciana Proto**.

3. **Sasha Diamond** was a rabbit princess who got shopkeeper/snow leopard **Michael Propster** thrown in prison in **Liesl Pereira's** *Fate Can Be Strange*. **Tasha Gordon-Solmon** directed the play.

4. In **Ariane Alcide's** *Perfect and Messy*, school bully **Arielle Goldman** discovered that she had a crush on her victim, **Jasminn Johnson**. **Kennedy Didier** dramaturged and **Annabelle Cousins** directed.

5. **Ethan Tejada's** *Soda*, with director **Jose Gamo** (stepping in for **Jose Duran**) and **Sam Gravitte**, gave us an onstage video game battle experience without benefit of hardware.

6. **Paton Ashbrook** and **Grantham Coleman** were a house flipper and a publishing CEO who helped each other in *Cory and Michel Together*, written by **Darius Beans**, dramaturged by **Michael Propster**, and directed by **Marchánt Davis**.

7. **Kaison Walker's** *Pickleball Legends* pitted **Matt Dallal** and **Bjorn DuPaty** against each other on the court. **Anna Phillips** was the ball and **Korey Jackson** the director.

8. *The Best Friends Dream*, by **Mia Gordon**, closed the evening with a sweet tale of a singing pig (**Nancy Giles**) and a cow (**Ben Mehl**) who was her emotional support buddy. **Lila Rachel Becker** directed it.

The support team for the show included **Avi A. Amon** as our music wizard, **Katie Bartz** on lights, **Christianne Bakewell** on costumes, **Hannah Birch Carl** on sound, and **Emma Giordano** as our stage manager. ♦

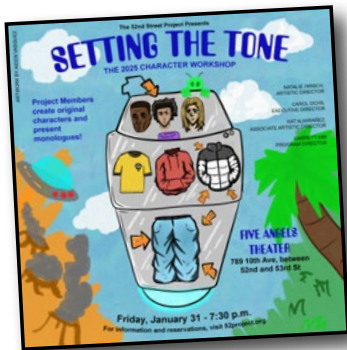


FALL PLAYMAKING SHOW REPORT

CLICK THEM TO SEE THEM!

TO THE MOON PHOTOS BY DENEKA PENISTON, PLAYWRIGHT PIX BY GRB

CHARACTER WORKSHOP: "SETTING THE TONE"



CLICK THE SQUARE TO SEE THE VIDEO ON YOUTUBE.

In **Garrett Kim's** Character Workshop, young members have the opportunity to create original characters, put together costumes that suit them, and then present monologues as their characters. This year's edition, entitled *Setting the Tone*, was staged on Friday, January 31 and featured **Jaelannie Rodriguez, Mateo Santoni, Milo Phelps, Cataleya Bernardo, Zion King Lamonge, and Atif Dowidar**. They were assisted and directed by **Precious Sipin, Helen Cespedes, Noah Gaynor, Anna Crivelli, Adam LaPorte, and Michael Propster**. **Jenni Swan** was our able stage manager. ♦



Jaelannie as **Delilah**, a 3-year old Manhattanite.



Mateo was **Eli**, an orangutan banana vendor.



Milo played **Zeke**, a teen-age hunter.



Cataleya gave us **Ashly**, a rat activist.



Zion was **Mark**, a 15-year old "barista artist."



Atif took on the form of **Turgock**, a scientist turkey.

CHARACTER WORKSHOP PHOTOS BY KAT

REPLAY: "TELL IT LIKE IT IS"



Ronald Peet and **Krystel Lucas** in *Mindsetting* by **Xavier Espinal**, directed by **Joanna Parson**. **Kareem Lucas** also played a role.



Faith Mitchell's *The Betrayal*, with **Ashley Marie Ortiz, Vanessa Porras, Faith, and Kareem Lucas** was directed by **Alicia Moeller**.



Xavier Faith Logan Jai-Lyzz

On February 21, we were treated to another of **Garrett Kim's** "New Platforms" productions. This was a **Replay** (sometimes described as "advanced Playmaking") show by the name of *Tell It Like It Is*. Four teen-aged playwrights had their scripts read by some of New York's finest actors. ♦



Jose Gamo, Ariel Estrada, and Aishling Pembroke in *Misery Loves Company* by **Logan Goicuria**, directed by **Adaire Kamen**.



Natalie Walker, Princess Jacob, and Sergio Mauritz in *Inner Thoughts*, by **Jai-Lyzz Rodriguez**, directed by **Matt Kagen**.



CLICK THE SQUARE TO SEE THE VIDEO ON YOUTUBE.

REPLAY PHOTOS BY ANDY INGALLS

DRAWING THE LINE

The Annual 52nd Street Project Gala of 2025

On March 10, 2025, we returned to the spacious and classy **Tribeca Rooftop** for our big fancy fundraiser of the year. The honorees of the the night were **Iris A. Brown** and **George Babiak**, the folks behind the “Project Look.” Iris has been a volunteer graphic designer (and chef!) for the Project for nearly 40 years. As for George, well, there’s more about him below! After a scintillating cocktail hour amid a panoply of museum-quality displays created by **Ana Gonzalez-Soto**, the guests shifted to the main room for dinner and a show, hosted by **Hank Azaria** (*The Simpsons*) and **Sharon Washington** (*New York, New York*). The highlight of the performance was a selection of songs written by young people who were also in attendance. The singers were **Marinda Anderson**, **Taylor Trench**, **Celia Keenan-Bolger**, and **Jin Ha**. The members who wrote the songs were **Makiyah Gray**, **Julian Wilder IV**, **Diana Abraján**, and **Grace V. Guity-Reyes**.

There was a good deal of speechifying, and a tribute video by **Edward Pritchard**, which brought tears to many eyes, especially the honorees. Click [THIS HYPERLINK](#) to see it. *Drawing The Line* was a blast, and raked in lots of cash. Thanks to everyone who came and/or helped! ♦

► Our Artistic Director **Natalie Hirsch** and our Executive Director **Carol Ochs** kicked off the night.



◀ Founder **Willie Reale** and host **Hank Azaria** ran a great auction (with real Simpsons voices!).

► **Sharon Washington** and board member **Maggie Odette** ran the show after the auction.



GALA PHOTOS BY DENEKA PENNISTON



Marinda Anderson sang Makiyah’s *Hot Tub to Roller Coaster*.



Taylor Trench performed Julian’s *Just Leave Him*.



Celia Keenan-Bolger gave us Diana’s *Only My Mom*.



Grace helped **Jin Ha** rock her song *Left Sock Protest*.



Iris and George did a foamcore toast to the Project.

BYE, GEORGE!

JOAQUIN CAOILI



Willie and George.

After 29 Years at the Project, **George Babiak**, the Project’s stalwart Director of Design and Production, is retiring. Few can remember the Project’s BGE (Before George Era) and it is impossible to provide a full account of the ways in which George’s life’s work has affected our community, but an attempt will here be made.

Let’s begin with the props, so sophisticated and so playful and so deeply in the spirit of the Project. His props got laughs, applause, guffaws and audible sighs of admiration. And he’s left an inventory of them; foam-core dogs and cats and forks and medieval weaponry and tarantulas and barbells and cheeseburgers and roosters and oysters and diamonds. Further, George has created a database of his catalog which can be printed and cut out when the original props wear out. Add to the catalog a gallery of some 3,600 terrific and reusable Scenic Slides (by George and others) representing any place a child’s mind can go. It should be noted that upon taking the job, lo, those many years ago, George had rarely taken pencil to paper to draw. George, the quintessential autodidact, saw

a need for this artwork and so he taught himself to create it. Indeed, whenever George saw a wanting element at the Project he either already knew how to fix it or he just FIGURED IT OUT.

Also outstanding on the Babiak legacy list is the modification and modernization of **Kevin Joseph Roach’s** “Instant Set”; including adding animations to the screen, all number of trap doors, the use of velcro, the addition of wheels to the furniture, the drawstring mechanisms that close doors and windows when actors forget and more. Even the template, design and publication of the the newsletter that you are now reading is George’s doing.

George went about his work with quiet humility, circumspect pride, and ferocious industry. His tireless efforts sent a silent, important message to each and every child. He took their work seriously and they were validated by his skill and attention. Indeed, George’s ability to take silly things seriously, to take his work seriously, but not himself seriously, that magical, intoxicating cocktail of talent, humor and humanity makes him unique.

And so we say a fond farewell to George Babiak, the Michelangelo of foam core and our dear friend. Yes, George is leaving, but a little dusting will reveal that his fingerprints are all over the Project and his efforts and his vision will be felt for generations to come. ♦

Willie Reale, Founder

"ON TOP OF THE WORLD" SPRING PLAYMAKING

CLICK THEM TO SEE THEM!

On the weekend of March 28-30, we presented our second batch of Playmaking shows for the season and they were big crowd-pleasers. A good thing, since our crowds were really big! If the photos and summaries below leave you wanting more, just click on the pics to see the YouTube videos of each play!



In Nezei Dickey's *Dreams*, Marinda Anderson and Michael Braun were a Russian mother and son at odds about Michael's sports career. Christian DeMarais directed.



A pitbull (KeLyn Durrel Jones) and a fugitive raptor dinosaur (Carson Elrod) faced a zombie invasion in Noah Sanchez's *The Finale*. George Babiak directed.



Crystal Dickinson and Brandon Dirden played the title characters in *The Journey with the Horse and the Dog*, written by BreeAnna Mack and directed by Krystel Lucas.



Ali Lopez-Sohaili was a deflated basketball and Daiva Deupree a muddy rollerskate in Reinisy Ramirez's *Fight for What You Want*, directed by Alex O'Daly (she's on p. 7, too).



Ever have conflict with a sibling? We're sure it couldn't have been as bad as the one experienced by Mallory Portnoy and Brian Bock in Sophia Morel's *The Royal Twins*, which was directed by Grace Rex.



Simone Recasner and Annie Fox were pandas with identity issues in Vivian Mignone's *The Story of Apple*, directed by Zohar Fuller.



Sony Trouble, by Jaaziel Herold, told the story of two battling brothers in an electronics store: a small flat-screen TV (Stephanie Jean Lane) and a remote control (Aaron Costa Ganis). Tackling store bully Josh Lewis brought them together. Michael Propster was the director.



Sarah Lopez was a silent surly penguin, Mat Hostetler was a liger (that's a hybrid lion and tiger) who was stuck in a swamp, and Ali Ewoldt was a Pina Colada-loving axolotl in Nicholas Tanner's *Swampy Friends*, which was directed by Austin Regan.

The production team for *On Top of The World: The Triumphant Plays* was Avi A. Amon as Composer/Music Director, Greg MacPherson as Lighting Designer, Crystal Thompson and Lara DeBruijn on Costumes, Harrison Walsh on Sound, and Marty Gleberman as our Stage Manager. ♦

PLAYMAKING PHOTOS BY CARIN VAN DER DONK

SPORTS PAGE

Results of the 23rd edition of the Project Ping-Pong Tournament, held on February 12, 2025



1st Place

Penguins on Vacay
Diego Caoili & Oliver Tanner



2nd Place

Sugar Rush
Mateo Santoni & Carol Ochs



3rd Place

Lefties in Protest
Michael Propster & Edgar Sinchi



4th Place

Slash Fire
Kaison Walker
& Andy Ingalls



Honorable Mention

Atif Dowidar
& Jai-Lyzz Rosario



Wackiest Team

The Well-Rounded
Kendal Hartse
& Hannah Santos



Most Improved

Josiah Perez
& Adolfo Sinchi



Best New Players

The Silly Billy Millies
Kaileela Hobby
& Gloria Sanchez



Best Dressed Team

The Wordsmiths
Xavier Espinal
& Ronald Peet



Good Sports

The Wrist Watchers
Samaria Alkandi
& Betsy Hogg



Best Team Name

Serving Sass
Katty Lopez
& Adaire Kamen

PHOTOS BY ANDY INGALLS AND GRB

MEET DIEGO CAOILI

George is leaving! Who is taking his place? The cheery young dude at right! We are a bit remiss, since we should have done a “Meet Diego” piece at least a year ago, when he signed on as our part-time Assistant Production Manager. He is now taking on the title of Production Manager while **Bri Weintraub** will be the Director of Design and Production, but Diego will be taking on most of the things that George has been doing here all these years.

Diego, like some of our other staffers, hails from San Francisco. He first came to our building as a young would-be musical theater performer in the **iTheatrics** program, a company that rents our theater floor during the summers. He kept rising in their company and then became an intern in ours, where he continued to rise! He has a tremendous number of skills, including competitive skiing, tap dancing, computer wizardry, foam-core cutting, and, obviously, ping-pong. We are pretty sure that Diego will make an excellent staff member. Say “hi” when you see him at our next show! ♦



Want to know more about the rest of our motley crew? [Visit the staff page on our website.](#)



Hi, P.U. Readers! I’m Ahmed, and I am the Sultan of this Sidebar! The following foundations, corporations, and government agencies recently made generous grants to The 52nd Street Project. We are grateful to them for their support as well as to the many individuals who help sustain the Project’s programs. ♦

| | | | |
|---|----------|--|----------|
| Department of Cultural Affairs | \$76,025 | Discretionary Funding from | |
| Jeffrey Seller Family Foundation | \$50,000 | Assemblymember Tony Simone | \$15,000 |
| Ruth Nelson Family Foundation | \$49,000 | Frederick Loewe Foundation | \$10,000 |
| Cantor Fitzgerald Relief Fund..... | \$35,000 | Lillian Goldman Charitable Trust | \$10,000 |
| Discretionary Funding from | | The Hudson Guild | \$5,000 |
| NYS Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal..... | \$30,000 | Morgan Stanley..... | \$5,000 |
| Abraham and Mildred Goldstein | | Customers Bank | \$5,000 |
| Charitable Trust..... | \$20,000 | Tiger Baron Foundation | \$5,000 |
| National Endowment for the Arts..... | \$20,000 | The Feldstein Foundation | \$1,000 |
| The Jean & Louis Dreyfus Foundation | \$15,000 | | |

(Gifts received November 19, 2024 to April 8, 2025)

IF YOU LIKE GOLF, WHY NOT COME TO...



The 52nd Street Project's

Thursday, May 15th, 2025

13TH ANNUAL GOLF OUTING



Join us for a fun-filled golf outing at **Blind Brook Country Club** in Rye, New York. Play 18 holes with friends, then celebrate the day’s success with dinner and drinks all while supporting The 52nd Street Project’s Teen Programming.

Contact **Ana Soto** at (212) 333-5252 or asoto@52project.org for more details.

MEGABITS • MEGABITS • MEGABITS



Alex O'Daly and Rachel James had a baby. His name is **Henry August James O'Daly** and he was born April 20, 2024. Here he is on St. Patrick's Day with Alex and big sis **Frankie**.



Lisa Kerner was a Project staff member way back when we first moved into the current clubhouse and theater. She worked here for years and now she has a full-blown family! Here she is with her husband **Vishal Patel**, **Wally** the dog, and new son **Niko**, born July 2024.



Here are ProjVol **Jennifer Mogbock** and her beau **Miguel**! They got married in New York City on Oct. 19, and their parents came from Canada and El Salvador for the event!



He was a boy in the Project and now he has four boys of his own! **Noel Polanco** and his wife **Ruthie** had little **Noah** (inset) on Jan. 11, 2025. Standing left to right are **Ephraim** (age 15), **Noel**, **Ozhiah** (5), **Ruthie**, and **Liam** (11). Fun fact: Noel's sons' initials actually spell N-O-E-L!



Ace volunteer **Betsy Hogg** got married to **Alec Silberblatt** in Brooklyn on April 5! Here they are with their folks! L to R: **Jay Silberblatt**, **Lori Sisson**, **Betsy**, **Alec**, **Kathy Hogg**, and **Jamie Hogg**. Love those turquoise kicks, Alec!

FLYER BAR PROFILE



**CATHY DANTCHIK
AND
LOUIS P. FRIEDMAN**

What they do for us-

Louis has been on the board since 1991, Cathy since 2002, and they have been our board co-chairs since 2013. That's a total of 57 years of board time!

Occupation-

Cathy: "Producer."

Louis: "I invest in companies to help them grow (like **Waterloo Sparkling Water**)."

Why they do what they do-

Cathy: "I love creating something out of an idea. Taking a story and imagining what it could be. How it can engage an audience and make people think and talk about it."

Louis: "I enjoy finding and working with talented people who have good ideas for businesses."

Place of birth-

Cathy: "Queens, NY."

Louis: "Dallas, Texas."

Habitat-

Cathy: "New York City."

Louis: "Miami Beach with summers on Long Island."

Hobbies-

Cathy: "Photography, theater, adventure, travel."

Louis: "Golf, tennis, and looking at contemporary art."

Last book read-

Cathy: "I've been reading scripts for the theatre, I haven't had much time to read an actual book. Any suggestions?"

Louis: "*Don Quixote* by **Cervantes** (it'd been sitting on the shelf for years and I finally read it!)"

Most recent accomplishment-

Cathy: "I won a Tony Award for one of the shows I was involved with" (that was *Stereophonic*, says the editor).

Louis: "Getting our 4-year old Bearded Collie, Jagger, to bark just a little less."

Best Project Memory-

Cathy: "Too many to list just one!"

Louis: "The annual scholarship dinner where I've been so lucky to spend time with kids and their families, handing the scholarship awards to The Project's recent high school graduates and college students, and learning about their post-Project journeys."

Credo

Cathy: "There are many chapters to your story, don't be afraid to turn the page."

Louis: "Try. Fail. Learn. Repeat."

Advice to kids-

Cathy: "Never give up and reach for the stars"

Louis: "Work hard, work smart and believe in yourself to accomplish amazing things with your life."

Favorite thing about the Project-

Cathy: "Everything!!"

Louis: "The talent, dedication and inspiring mentorship of The Project's amazing professional staff and volunteers has created a profound impact on thousands of kids."

On Flyer Bars-

Cathy: "One is never enough..)"

Louis: "I love them so much (but wish I wouldn't get the caramel stuck between my teeth)." ♦

SNAPZ!

To get ready for this year's benefit (see page 3) we spent a lot of time reminiscing about foam-core props. Turns out that our members hang onto their props long after their shows have ended. Here's a gallery of long-time and former members with their foam-and-paper souvenirs.

