



PROJECT UPDATE

ISSUE #96 • JANUARY, 2026 • DIEGO CAOILI & JOHN SHEEHY, EDITORS

NEW EDITORS IN TOWN!

Hello from the new Editorial Team here at the Project Update.

As close readers of the newsletter will already know, our former chief editor George Babiak has retired from the Project and gone to live (most of the year) in Calgary, Alberta. And while filling his inestimable shoes presents its own set of challenges, we can not let that impact our devoted community of supporters, volunteers, members and their families, who may wonder, "What's been going on over there?"

Production Manager **Diego Caoili** and Director of Institutional Advancement **John Sheehy** are combining forces to continue the stream of photos and recaps on the previous few months of activities, shows, programs, trips, Megabits updates, and previews of coming productions. We hope that you'll continue to download and enjoy - or at least skim it as you scroll.

In a changing and uncertain world, you can still count on the continuity of the P.U., at least for now.



IN THIS ISSUE OF P.U.:

Photos and recaps of the 4 Project shows and events of the last 9 months



Stage Combat



Dancemaking



Teen Ensemble



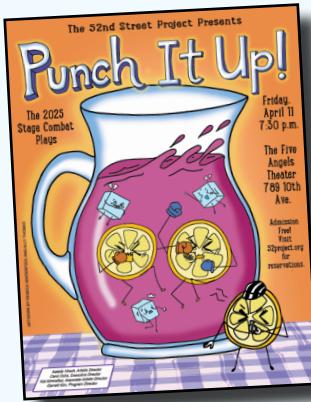
Place Play



Golf Recap



Click the poster to see the video on YouTube!



SPIKED PUNCH

In our Stage Combat program, the young people, alongside adult volunteers, learn the techniques of safe stage violence, like hair-pulls, slaps, kicks, punches, choking, all while keeping each other safe from harm. They then create a high conflict scene where they can use these skills in context. PUNCH IT UP, was presented at the Five Angels on Friday, April 11, 2025. This New Platforms program was run by Program Director **Garrett Kim**, with lead instructor Kerry Warren. Thanks to **Jenni Swan** for her flawless stage management of the chaos.

▼ In THE PLAYGROUND TRAGEDY, New kid Harold (**Jacob Presson**), just wants to play kickball. But when Timothy (**Logan**) says, "No," it becomes more like kickbutt.



◀ After Sasha (**Olivia Gilliat**) is accidentally smacked in the head with a shovel, she suddenly thinks she's a pirate confronting her sworn enemy, rather than her sister Naomi (**Gloria**) in OUR (TOTALLY NORMAL) SCHOOL ROUTINE.



▼ When Audrey (**Betsy Hogg**) tries to steal a boyfriend from Molly (**Samaria**) there's a showdown in the girl's bathroom at school, in THE BREAK UP.



► The gallant Lancelot (**Caelne**) seeks to rescue his sister from the dastardly Bartholemew (**Kate Abbruzzese**) in EVIL VS. GOOD KNIGHT.



▲ A simple visit to the corner store by Herold & Sylvester (**Jose Gamo & Edgar**), turns into a LOTTERY BRAWL when there's a winning scratch-off ticket at stake.



◀ Rosa (**Raquel Chavez**) snitches on her sister Victoria (**Bella**) after she sneaks out on a school night, but after battling they have to reconcile, since they're SISTER SISTER.



DON'T GET IT TWISTED

Our Dancemaking program teaches the young people some of the aspects of creating and performing dance pieces, such as shape, levels, dynamics, and partnering. On Friday, June 15, 2025, the company came together to share what they'd created in TWIST & SHOUT under the supervision of Program Director **Garrett Kim** and Lead Instructor **Elli Stovall Brown**.

FRENEMIES, created and performed by **Jessica & Meredith Garretson**. Choreographer's Note: Our piece is inspired by "The Black Swan" and friends who are enemies that are trying to come together. A story that happens to many people. ▲



FULL CIRCLE, created and performed by **Katty & Gracie Fojtik**. Choreographer's Note: Working on this dance was so much fun especially working on it with Grace because of how easy it was to bond with Grace and how fun it was to be partners with her and create a dance that I love everything about. I especially loved the dance move where we're across from each other and playing a hand game together because it reminded both of us how it felt to be kids because the move represents how kids act in a way. It brought on a feeling of nostalgia for both me and Grace. ▲



GOOFY ENEMIES, created and performed by **Milo & Bito Boucher**.

Choreographer's Note: I want to tell you how this was a very unique and new creation that was super fun and fun to learn with Bito. ▲



FRIENDSHIP GAMES, created and performed by **Brooke & Lennox T. Duong**. Choreographer's Note: When Lennox and I first met, we realized we were both injury prone (LOL). So we led the choreography with caution while still trying to keep the dance "cute."

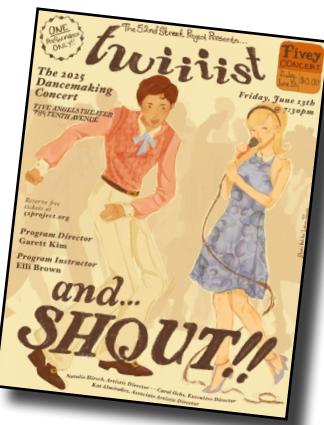
Friendship is an important part of life so incorporating it with the bittersweet concept of childhood since I am graduating (woo!) was really important to us. ▲



DISASTEROUS, created and performed by **Mateo & Evan Fisk**. Choreographer's Note: I think that this was very interesting to choreograph and very goofy in the thinking process but I think overall it was pretty good. ▼



The company performed the opening piece **BAD GOOD LUCK!** ▲





TEEN ENSEMBLE PHOTOS BY BRIDGET DELANEY & ANDY INGALLS, POSTER ART BY NASEEM ABDUL-MAJID

WRITING ON THE WALL TEEN ENSEMBLE

Culminating the activities for the spring of 2025 was the full-production of the Teen Ensemble One-Act Festival, WRITING ON THE WALL. Four new plays were written by adults, specifically for members of the Ensemble, and were then directed by other adults. Original music was written and performed by **Lesley Braver**. The Teen Ensemble is overseen by Associate Artistic Director **Kat Almirañez**.

The Teen Ensemble, Spring 2025 (l. to r.): **Aiden**, **Kaytie**, **Sarah**, **Melanie**, **Xavier**, **Naseem**, **Olive**, **Adolfo**, & **Hannah**. (At the far right is composer and Music Director **Lesley Braver**.) ▼



In IYKYK, by **Beto O'Byrne**, **Aiden** & **Naseem** played a pair of Star Wars obsessed fans who have to go to an emergency room after an injury while practicing a light saber fight recreation. **Xavier** played the overtaxed ER doctor, who helps protect all of the patients when there's an I.C.E. raid. Directed by **Jose-Maria Aguila**. ►

The zombie apocalypse is here in **Adaire Kamen's** BRAINS. **Survivors Adolfo & Olive** have to find a way to communicate with walking-dead, vegan zombie **Hannah**, before someone gets hurt. Directed by **Evan Isabella**. ►

Cousins dealing with the legacy of making their abuela's Sunday dinner was the subject of SALTY by **Naomi Lorrain**. **Kaytie** tried to go the traditional route, while **Melanie** was only interested in innovation, even to the detriment of being edible. Directed by **Liz Sweeney**. ◀

Charly E. Simpson's THE ONES IN LINE, saw young, politically engaged teens at a rally (played by **Melanie & Xavier**), trying to get the attention of an up and coming politician that they believe can make a difference (played by **Sarah**). Directed by **Lynne Rosenberg**. ◀

We'd like to also acknowledge the participation of Stage Manager **Charlie Zuckerman**, Lighting Designer **Finn Meyercord**, Sound Designer **Emi Verhar**, and Costume Designer **Kate (K8) Revels**.

GOING ALL OUT

Our Place Play program brings Project members together with adults, and they all participate in various improvisation games, workshops, and team-building activities, over the course of a week, in order to create a full-length piece of theater, that all happens in one location. This year's production of GOING, GOING, GONE, directed by Associate Artistic Director **Kat Almirañez**, performed on Saturday, July 12, 2025, was set in a Murder Mystery Mansion.



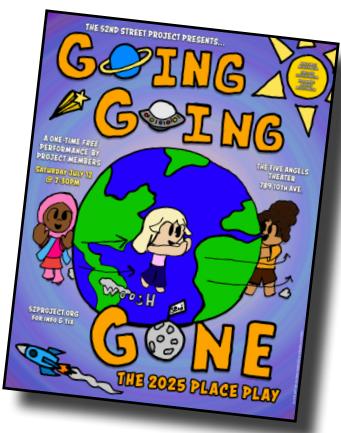
◀ Soccer teammates Müstard and Heinz (**Omari Chancellor & Mamadou**) crash their bus in the rain and have to take shelter in the spooky Le Bon-Bon Murder Estate, where Müstard is hoping to finally find his long-lost sister.

The owner of the estate, Marie Picasso (**Shaddai**) is worried that the mystery weekend goes well so that she might sell the estate and pursue her dream of being a famous painter, while the maid, Dijon (**Dela Meskienyar**) is distracted in her duties, worrying that she'll never find her long-lost, soccer player brother. ►

A scammer, Sally Salazar (**Precious Sipin**) is only at the estate to steal the owner's paintings and sell them as her own. She gets thrown into a room with VP Kylie Johnson (**Ariane**) who is hoping to get the estate property for herself. ▼



Last to arrive at the estate are Gregory & Arthur (**Chris Dooly & Angel**), a pair of very old friends who haven't seen each other in over 50 years. Gregory feels it's time to throw himself into becoming a crime novelist, while Arthur has become reticent to try anything new. ▼



In the kitchen, Chef R. (**Grace**) is looking forward to retiring on her own private island, but first she needs to get through the weekend with brand new sou chef Muffy (**Molly Carden**) and her outlandish ideas for murder-pastries. ►



The stories all came together with live music by **Avi Amon**, original lyrics by **John Sheehy**, support & Costume Design from teen counselor **Amirah Hancock** and intern **Sky Edwards**, under the watchful eye of Lighting Designer and Stage Manager **Bri Weintraub**.

GOLF RECAP!

Once again, a group of adults gathered for our annual Golf Tournament, an event that has nothing to do with children except that it ultimately benefits them. On May 15, seven teams headed north to the immaculate and rather posh Blind Brook Club in Rye, NY, where the weather behaved better than most people do and the holes were scattered at what seemed like unreasonable distances.

Sticks were swung, balls were chased, and spirits remained high throughout the day. Darling friends **Lewis Black & David Costabile** joined in the proceedings, lending their presence to the cause, and Director of Development, **Ahmed Attia**, was there to capture the action, a small selection of which appears here.

Golf Recap written by Ana Soto



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. ♦♦

NYC Department of Cultural Affairs:

Cultural Development Fund \$104,000
Estee Lauder: Writing Change
Collective \$65,111
The Pinkerton Foundation \$50,000
Cantor Fitzgerald Relief Fund \$30,000
The Horace W. Goldsmith
Foundation \$30,000
Assemblymember Tony Simone \$25,000

The Shubert Foundation \$20,000

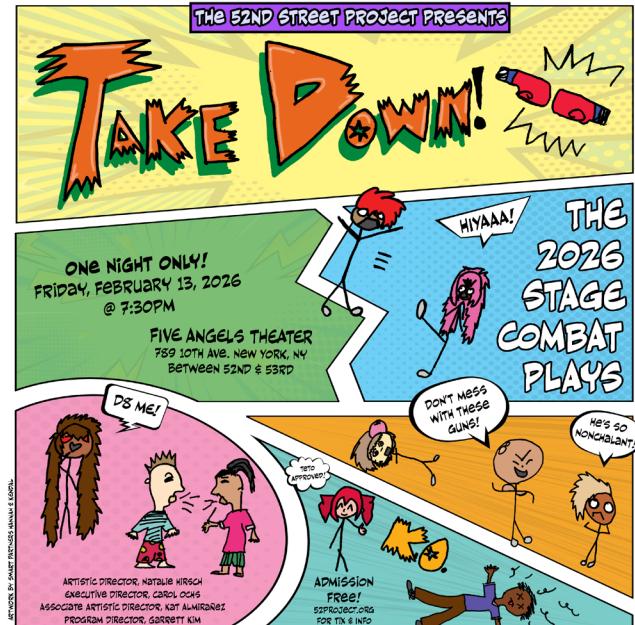
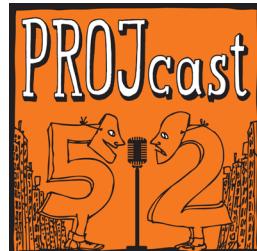
Man House Productions
(Who Wants To Be A Millionaire) \$16,000
Jean and Louis Dreyfus Foundation \$15,000
Frederick Loewe Foundation \$10,000
Americans for the Arts:
National Arts Relief Fund \$10,000
Ninth Avenue Association \$5,000
Tiger Baron Foundation \$5,000

(Gifts received April 8, 2025 to January 9, 2026)

SUBSCRIBE TO "THE PROJCAST!"

Did you know that we have a podcast that features the writing and voices of our young members? Well, we do!

Just click on the logo at right and start downloading these fascinating nuggets of information and entertainment! The most recent episode features John Sheehy's interviews with our newest Playmaking members! ♦♦



MEGABITS • MEGABITS • MEGABITS • MEGABITS

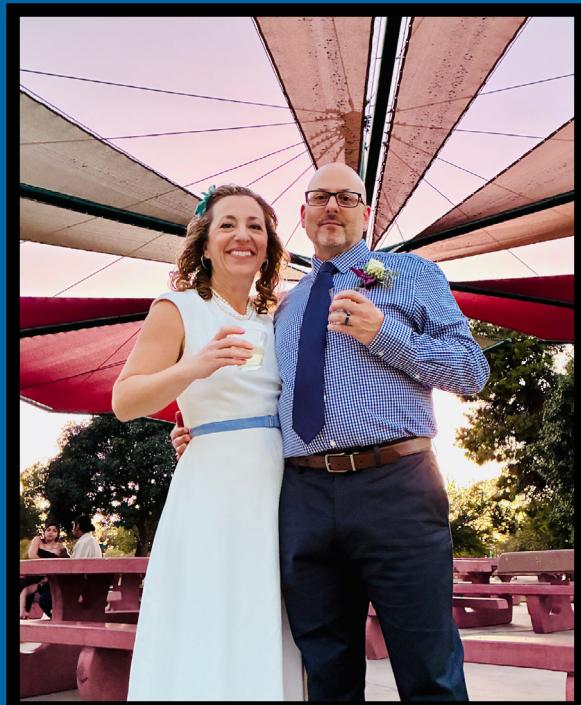
WEDDINGS TIMES TWO(EY)!



◀ Project Volunteer Susan McGinnis and her partner Michael Bistritz got married in their back yard in Chagrin Falls, OH, on Saturday, August 30, 2025. Replacing the rice at the end of the ceremony were little bottles of bubbles.



► Former Associate Artistic Director Megan Cramer and her partner of over 6 years, Aaron Levy, eloped to Las Vegas and got married on 11/1/25. While they didn't have an Elvis wedding, they did get married in a park with lots of beautiful chaotic life happening around them. Megan and Aaron live in Marietta, GA, and their house is kind of like the Project Clubhouse (Aaron writes plays, Megan sings while Aaron plays guitar, and they both play a lot of ping pong!).



BARBARA McCRANE

DECEMBER 6, 1964 – JULY 29, 2025

The Project mourns the loss of beloved actor/director volunteer **Barbara McCrane**. Barbara was blessed with a sly wit and a warm singing voice, a combination beautifully suited to the unsentimental sentimentality paradox at the core of all great

Project performances. Project old timers will remember her moving turn with Anthony Maldonado in Chris Ceraso and Henry Krieger's *Orlando* and *La Contessa* in the *Tyler Hill* 1993 One-on-One series. That same year featured her directorial debut with Judy Agosto's riveting play *The Baby*, featuring Frank Wood and Erika Alexander.



Barbara found her way to the Project through her brother Paul McCrane, also an actor volunteer, back in the day. As project lore has it, Paul McCrane, in cahoots with Willie Reale, schemed to make a match of their siblings at the Project's tenth anniversary party. The plan worked. Barbara McCrane and Paul Reale enjoyed 31 years of marriage and gave the world Hannah Reale, a working journalist, not coincidentally in possession of a sly wit and a warm singing voice. ♦

Barbara, pictured hula hooping on the grass.

- Willie Reale

FLYER BAR PROFILE



MARTY GLEBERMAN

HOMEWORK IS BEING HELPED!

Sometimes at home you don't have a lot of time or maybe it's not nice enough of a background. You can have tutors or work on your own so you are not distracted every 5 mins.

- Liesl, 12

The reading corner is nice and fun to read in!

- Kaylee 9

It's good to have homework help because you don't have time to do it at home, you can do it at homework help.

- Penelope 10

What they do for the Project: Stage Manager since 2018, as well as some prop design & construction.

Their Occupation: Young Adult Librarian (I am most-of-the-way an adult, but I work specifically with teens!).

Why they do what they do: I think it's awesome when people can do cool stuff for free, and pretty much everything you can do at a library is free! Did you know that libraries do so much more than lend out books? You can try out building and coding kits, learn to use a sewing machine, get help applying for jobs, and even do yoga! I like helping people get their questions answered and learn new things and find questions they didn't know they had, and that's why I like being a librarian.

Place of birth: Right here in NYC, 20 blocks South and on the opposite side of the island to the Project.

Habitat: A cozy apartment in Jackson Heights, Queens. My plants and I do our best not to kill each other.

Hobbies: I sew and crochet, as well as trying to keep on top of my reading list.

Most recent accomplishment: I made my first pair of jeans! I was really intimidated to start, but once the project got going it ended up being pants, pretty much just like the other pants I've made. Two legs and everything.

Last Book Read: The Executioners Three by Susan Dennard. I love a spooky, atmospheric mystery when the weather starts to get cold! I'm also reading the manga series Witch Hat Atelier and Spy X Family.

Best Project memory: Watching Neil D'Astolfo try not to break character while his mustache was falling off as he portrayed King Kubabi the Cheetah in Samaria's play Journey of the Death Potion (2022). I was in the back of the house calling the show, and Bri and Katie and I were trying to balance dying of laughter, staying on top of our cues, and trying to signal to Neil to just take the mustache all the way off instead of letting it flop across the stage two steps behind his face. Neil is a champion.

Personal Credo: A loose sock is nobody's friend.

Advice for Project members: This isn't advice, it's a request - please say hi to the volunteers! We think you're cool and would love to chat with you! We're big fans of your work :)

Favorite thing about the Project: The people! The Project might have the lowest number of unpleasant people of any organization I have ever worked with.

On Flyer bars: Eat them outside the theater! ☺

I like homework help because when I come to The 52nd Street Project, they give me a quiet calm and relaxed space to finish my homework peacefully and efficiently.

- Atif, 12

