



PROJECT UPDATE

ISSUE #98 • SEPT., 2026 • DIEGO CAOILI & JOHN SHEEHY, EDITORS

Click the poster to see the video on YouTube!



UP TO THEIR OWN DEVISING

In May, the Teen Ensemble presented their latest devised production UP, DOWN, ALL AROUND, under the guidance of adult volunteer directors and Associate Artistic Director **Kat Almirañez** (1).

The play consists of a series of vignettes examining what it means to look up, down, all around, figuratively and literally.

There were political figures trying to inspire crowds like Olive (2), and a slightly too slick pop star like Brooke (3).

On a mountain, a couple of climbers, Adolfo & Naseem (4), one looking up and the other down,

have to rely on each other to get out of a dangerous situation.

A couple of friends, Cae & Melanie (5) share what they are looking forward to in the future.

Detective Jai-Lyzz looks all round for clues to who killed Hannah, only to discover that it was Kaytie, who even took a selfie with the corpse (6). In bed at night, Aiden (7) looking up at the ceiling contemplates what maturity means for him as modeled by his uncle.

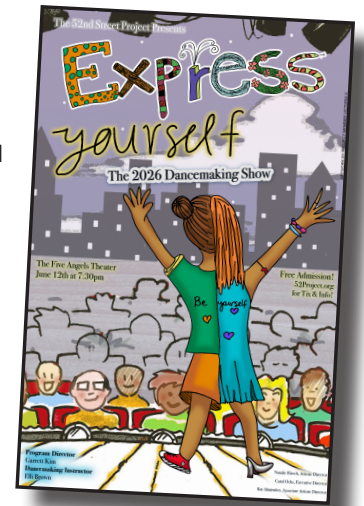
The piece concluded with an original theme song sung by the company, music/lyrics and guitar accompaniment by Ensemble Member Jai-Lyzz The Ensemble (8), front: Hannah, **Anna Phillips** (Director), Kaytie, Caelnne, Jai-Lyzz, **Diego Caoili**, Kat; second row: **Marchant Davis** (Director), Adolfo, Naseem; back; **Charlie Zuckerman**

(Stage Manager), **Aaron Conover** (Lighting Designer), **Ally Thomas** (Director), **Bri Weintraub**, **Michael Propster** (Director), Brooke, Melanie, Olive, Aiden, Rebeca, & **Ben Page** (Composer/Music Director). Special thanks to Ensemble member Kylee (Wardrobe), and to volunteers **Terra Chaney**, **Matt Kagen**, & **Nicole Serra** for their work with the Ensemble throughout the year.



IT'S AN EXPRESSION

Dancemaking is a New Platforms program that brings Project Members together with adult volunteers, and through a series of workshops coordinated by Program Director **Garrett Kim** and taught by Lead Instructor **Elli Stovall Brown**, they learn the basics of dance, so that they can create a piece for them to perform together. This year's Dancemaking show, EXPRESS YOURSELF, was presented Friday, June 12th. Click the image of the poster to jump to the YouTube stream.



(1) **Leisl & Stephanie Linas** performed "A Frenetic Frenzied Friendship." Leisl's note: *This dance consists of two friends that are always messing with each other. They always find a way to play pranks but one day it goes a bit too far, leading to an end of the frenetic "frenzied" friendship. We liked how over time, we realized that dance wasn't just the "picture-perfect" stuff we see on TV. Instead we learned that dance in general is as simple as just moving your body.*

(2) **Lalune & Aishling Pembroke**'s piece was "See You Later." Lalune's note: *I like parallel moves. I liked using mirror movement. I wanted to have a mix of different tempos. I liked having big and high energy movements.*

(3) **Reinisy & Molly Camp** offered "Backwards Angry Battered Pretzel Toast!!" Reinisy's note: *One of our favorite parts of our choreography is the toaster because we got inspired during the machines lesson. It took us about 20 min to figure out our music for choreography, and yes we did pick one. The reason we picked this one is because it matches our staccato movement with the drums.*

(4) **Christian DeMarais & Atif** danced "The Last Dance." Atif's note: *I got inspiration of this dance from the sons because the sons portrayed a medieval theme, along with a eerie mood.*

(5) **John-Henry Hirozawa & Angel** offered "Find the Orb." Angel's note: *It's about adventure, find peace, redemption.*

(6) **Betsy Hogg & Kaylee** were in "2 Mysterious Friends Meet!" Kaylee's note: *The music fit just well into the choreography. The choreography fit just right into the theme.*

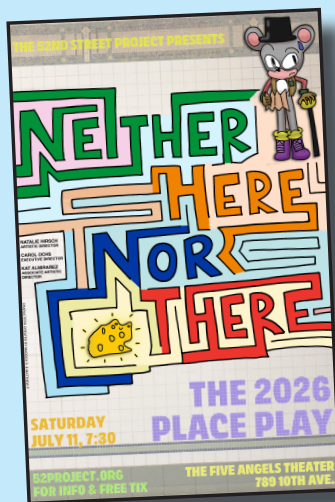


(7) **Darius & Marco Porras** danced "The Evolution." Darius' note: *We wanted to show the evolution of the world like for example forest and fish. Also the music fit in with our dance. My favorite part of the dance was the handshake at the end.*

(8) **Precious Sipin & Makiyah** joined up for "Coming Back Together." Makiyah's note: *We were friends and then we are not friends and then got into an argument and then make up.*

(9) The company performed the opening piece "Between a Rock (& Paper & Scissors) & a Hard Place," which was choreographed by our Dancemaking Lead Instructor **Elli Stovall Brown** (10). Special thanks goes out to lighting designer **George Kielty**.





THE PLACE IS THE THING

Place Play pairs Project members with adults, and they participate in improvisation games, workshops, and team-building activities, over the course of a week, in order to create a full-length piece of theater. On the first day, they create characters and choose a location where all of these characters can interact. This year's production was **NEITHER HERE NOR THERE**, directed by Associate Artistic Director **Kat Almirañez**, performed on Saturday, July 11th. The place for the play was Sir William Dragon's Castle of Fire, click the image of the poster if you'd like to visit on YouTube.

At the castle, (1 & 2) the crown prince (**Matthew**) and the castle manager (**Angelica Toledo**) have a packed schedule to get through including a coronation ceremony. But the prince would rather crochet a dress for his sister, than become king, but no one seems to listen to him.



Two estranged brothers (3 & 4), the castle's butler (**Gus Reale**) and a delivery man (**Darius**), reunite unexpectedly. But one may be the long lost true heir, and the other may be willing to do anything to keep the scheduled coronation from being disrupted. The true lesson: if you're going to pinky-swear, make certain no one is doing "crossies" behind their backs.



The castle guard (**Nezai**) meets the newly hired tour guide (**Jose Gamo**) (5 & 6), and while they have to deal with a couple of tourists (Interns **Mari Haff** & **Kim Suarez-Villao**) they find themselves on an adventure in the hidden corridors of the castle, and find the Heart of Fire, an invaluable gem.



(7 & 8) Freshly hired chef (**Berniece**) is tasked with making the perfect soup for the coronation, but soon encounters a sorceress who has been trapped for centuries in a tower (**Erin Anderson**). The day goes haywire, as the sorceress plots her escape with a rain of frogs, disappearing castle walls, and magically rigged Yelp reviews.



Besties (9 & 10), the princess (**Isabella**) and the dragon tamer (**Lori Newsom**), wishing to help each other out, drink a swap potion. But they make the rookie mistake of not reading the very long list of possible effects. They must find a way to return to their own selves before the coronation, and possibly find out a few things about each other along the way.



Original music, and live underscoring was provided by **Cassidy O'Connell** (11). The company (12) performed a theme song, with music by Cassidy & lyrics by **John Sheehy**: (l. to r.) **Angelica Toledo**, **Nezai**, **Kim Suarez Villao**, **Mari Haff**, **Matthew**, **Jose Gamo**, **Isabella**, **Lori Newsom**, **Berniece**, **Erin Anderson**, **Darius**, & **Gus Reale**. Special thanks to costume designer **Levi Cohen-Mcfall**; stage manager, lighting and sound designer **Bri Weintraub**; and prop designer, live-stream director **Diego Caoili**.



JOURNEYING ON THE ONE-ON-ONES

Summers mean One-on-Ones at the Project. In this beloved program, the young people are paired with adults in an original short musical (usually written by that adult). We travel out of town for a week of rehearsals, (this year to Rumson, NJ), then return to the city to present a full production. WHERE YOU AT? *Plays from Around the World* each featured a landmark randomly drawn from a hat. Click the poster image at right to watch the show on YouTube.

The company (1) kicked off the show with the WHERE YOU AT? theme song, lyrics by **John Sheehy**, music by **Avi A. Amon** (who was also the Music Director for the production).

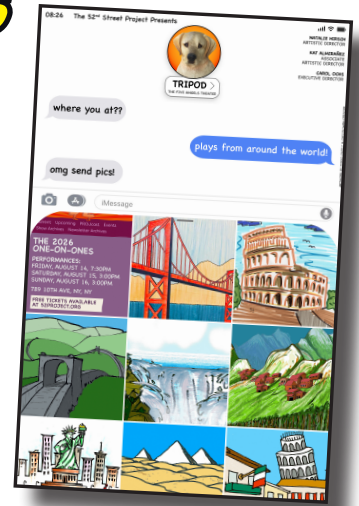
In **Johnny G. Lloyd's** *WE'RE SAILORS* (2), a pair of seafaring brothers (Nicholas & **Matt Provenza**) decide to check out land-sailing past the Golden Gate Bridge.

George Babiak's *A SLICE OF PISA* (3), had midwestern moms, Millie & Kathy (Penelope & **Evan Isabella**), the lucky winners of a night in the Leaning Tower, made even more off-kilter by a ghost with a knife.



According to **Michael Propster's** *THE BIG SPARK THEORY*, an alien (Maddox) must ignite a spark of imagination in a drone pilot (Michael), at the alien's secret lair in the Great Pyramids (4).

THE HEAD AND THE HEART, by **Jose-Maria Aguila**, focused on a son (Matthew) and his eternally youthful dad (Jose-Maria) as they playfully battle from the Colosseum, to space, and beyond, while managing a relationship that is growing apart (5).



A pair of frenemies, an HR worker (**amo**) and the youngest ever tour guide/historian (Sophia), are forced to team up in the games celebrating NY's premier landmark in amo's *LADY LIBERTY ENLIGHTENING THE WORLD* (6).

Emotional walls aren't the only barriers challenging the tennis champion sisters (Grace & **Kaaron Briscoe**) in Kaaron's *THE GREAT WALL OF TENNIS* (7).

In pursuit of their 100th badge, a pair of scouts (Kaylie & **Anna Phillips**) wind up at Niagara Falls, trying to get a vocal reaction to scary stories in Anna's *CAMP SCREAM* (8).

When a show-and-tell amulet accidentally transports them to the Infinite Abyss, a teacher and a student (**Sharmarke Yusuf** & Zaire) have fun flying over Machu Picchu, but need to get over their insecurities to get back in time for lunch in Sharmarke's *FREESTYLE* (9).

The Project members of WHERE YOU AT?: Kaylie, Penelope, Nicholas, Sophia, Zaire, Maddox, Grace & Matthew (10).

Creative team: Lights - **Finn Meyercord**, Costumes - **Kate (K8 Revels)**, Sound - **Emi Verhar**, Stage Manager - **Charlie Zuckerman**, Props & Projections - **Diego Caoili**, **McKenna Seegmiller**, & Charlie, Crew Members - **Mari Haff**, **Jai-Lyzz**, **Kate Ryan**, & **Kim Suarez-Villao**.



We are proud to announce the institution of
The 52nd Street Project Hall of Fame
 and its first inductee **Daniel Judah Sklar**,
 the inventor of Playmaking.



In 1987, Playwright Daniel Judah Sklar brought his visionary curriculum Playmaking to The 52nd Street Project and the Project was forever changed.

Until that point, all of the Project's programs were focused on providing the young people of Hell's Kitchen with opportunities to act and sing in plays written by our playwright and composer volunteers.

Then came Daniel, whose Playmaking gives voice to the kids' inner selves. Their voices are then amplified by the Project's gifted corps of volunteer actors and directors and further boosted by its whimsical volunteer designers. The resulting theater pieces are infectious, inspiring, sometimes moving, often hilarious and for many of our members, life changing. Some will tell you that it is the most entertaining show in town.

Playmaking, as invented by Daniel and as presented "Project-Style," gives individual young people a seminal positive experience with the written word. It provides an opportunity for an audience of family, friends and strangers to applaud their work and their imaginations. And most importantly it allows children a chance to fall in love with something that has come out of themselves.

This is the gift that Daniel has given to so so many.

There will be a whole class of new inductees introduced next year, so stay tuned to the Project Update or better yet, come see a show and make a right walking out of the theater. The HOF is just past the Johnny Coffeeshopolis Coffee Bar on the way to the restrooms. - W.R.



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. ♦

The Pinkerton Foundation.....	\$50,000	Councilmember Virginia Maloney	\$20,000
Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation	\$30,000	The Shubert Foundation.....	\$20,000
Assemblymember Tony Simone.....	\$25,000	Four Friends Foundation	\$10,000
National Endowment for the Arts.....	\$25,000	Tiger Baron Foundation	\$5,000
New York State Council on the Arts	\$20,000	Councilmember Carl Wilson.....	\$5,000

(Gifts received January 9, 2026 to August 3, 2026)

IN MEMORIAM

DR. PETER RANDOLPH

The Project mourns the loss of Dr. Peter Randolph. Peter, his wife Helen and their Project Actor/Writer/Director Volunteer son Christopher hosted the Project at their home in Wareham Massachusetts for over 20 years. The old guard well remembers the summer of 1991 when 30 of us descended on the house to be greeted a day later by a blow hard called Hurricane Bob, a Category 5 storm that walloped Wareham. We were literally in the eye of



the storm. We lived for days without electricity or running water. Peter heroically drove to New Hampshire and found the last gas powered generator in New England. He hooked it up and we had enough juice to power the refrigerator, table lamps enough to study our lines and operate the toaster so we could enjoy toasted sweet Portuguese bread which is a house specialty. To be sure, Peter is buttering a daily slice in the hereafter. - W.R. ♦

Peter pictured in the kitchen of his Wareham, MA home.

SUSAN VITUCCI

The Project is further saddened by the loss of Susan Vitucci, a cherrished volunteer writer and performer for many, many years. During her time at the Project, she befriended super volunteer, composer Henry Krieger. The friendship resulted in a collaboration on a wondrous Italianate operetta called La Pulcina Piccola, a loosey goosey adaption of



Chicken Little which was a hit at the New York Theatre Workshop. This is what happens at the Project, good-hearted people connect to create light-hearted work that fills our hearts. It should be noted that the New York Theater Workshop was founded by Stephen Graham, former chair of our board and the good-hearted guy who suggested to Henry that he should volunteer. - W.R. ♦

Susan with Lili Cooper on a Playmaking trip to Tyler Hill, PA.