HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE: THE SURPRISING PLAYS
The 2019 Playback Shows
In Playback, Project Members write plays for themselves to star in with adult partners. This year’s edition happened Oct. 18-20.

THE DESIGN AND TECH TEAM
Richard C. Walter ................ Composer/Maestro
Michael Piatkowski .................. Costumes
Elizabeth Schweitzer ................ Lighting
Kaylie Groff .......................... Sound
Margaret Gleberman .................. Stage Manager

THE BRIDGHAMPTON HOST FAMILIES
Alex Gersten-Vassilaros, Louis & Patrice Friedman, and Cathy Danchik.

1. In Nyla Blake-Soden’s Only Two Weeks, Nyla (in big tub) had to write a hit song for manager Alexander Lemus (in big wig) in just a fortnight!
2. Waitresses Jade Johnson and Daiva Deupree worked together to settle some serious family issues in Jade’s New Besties.
3. Gilbert Rosario and Jose-Maria Aguila were rival bounty hunters who turned out to be brothers with a common enemy in Gilbert’s Bounty Bros.
4. In Amari Dubose’s A Moon Between Opinions, uptight exec Korey Jackson and hip yogi Amari traveled to the 70’s and beyond to find themselves.
5. Carlos Jimenez and KeiLyn Durrel Jones taught us that Rappers and Police Officers Always Go Together (or so says Carlos’ title).
6. Nikolai Alvarez’s Cucaracha was a taut prison drama that pitted Nikolai against a bitter frenemy played by Jose Duran.

Our next Playmaking show is March 20-22. Check out the flyer on page 10.

YOUR OFFICIAL RECAP OF THE LAST SIX MONTHS OF PROJECT HISTORY.
In *College Adventures*, written by Amirah Hancock, Amirah and her Best Friend Forever Arielle Goldman traveled to Maine to visit Harvard University. George Babiak and Ana Soto played passengers and operated bees that got loose in the airplane’s cabin. Both they and their friendship survived.

Aengus O’Donnell gave us *The Lightning Ninja’s Quarrel: The Ultimate Battle*, a play in which Aengus and his partner Jimmy Kenna played ninja brothers whose relationship became unbelievably toxic. There were a lot of throwing stars, knives, and shadow clone warriors played by the backstage crew.

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**GAME CHANGERS**

Celebrating two Key Players: Crystal Dickinson and Brandon Dirden

It’s a game-themed night of festivity, musical entertainment, and fine food to benefit The 52nd Street Project.

Come play with us Monday, May 4th 6:30 p.m. at Capitale on Grand & Bowery.

For information and/or reservations contact Kali “The Banker” Crandall at (212) 333-5252 or crandall@52project.org
Gus Dances Off

When I danced on, it was 21 years ago. Willie Reale, our Founder, had stepped down after 17½ years. Good job, I say. We honored him with the Reale Finale, a meravigliosa festa, certo, which means a really good time. The next day I go to work at the Project.

Moving on, I’m five years in, I’m crossing 10th Avenue, with some burgeoning playwrights and the 2003 associate artistic director, Megan Sandberg-Zakian, heading to the first Project Clubhouse at 500 West 52nd Street for a Playmaking class. I turn to Megan and say “This might be the best job I’ll ever have.”

2005, Wareham, the One on Ones, Holidays In The Sun. It’s lunchtime in Peter and Helen Randolph’s kitchen. We’re deep into the week, and everybody is salty and everybody has sand on them, in their shoes or in their pockets or in their hair. We’re all a little more seashore than hot asphalt and AC and you don’t want to go home. 10-year-old Jason Gil stands up on his chair in the middle of the kitchen, and there are a lot of people in there, and nobody complains, we all want to be together, and Jason has his smile on crooked and his eyes are shining and he says “I have never been so happy surrounded by cheese.”

Today, it’s February. My life has been much more art than science, and I’m glad for it. Willie gave me a shot and that worked for me, and I gave Natalie Hirsch a shot and it’s working for Natalie too. I am grateful for being a big part of a number of wrinkles, big wrinkles like our new home that still feels new, medium wrinkles like Dancemaking and the new set, and little wrinkles like comp days and changing “No alienating, no bickering” to “We all belong, we all get along.”

Leaving the Project is bittersweet, more sweet than bitter, sweet for all of the people who have blessed my life over these years. My next workplace, when it is found, will be in the city of New York, and I know how to get to 789 10th Avenue. Here I go, on a leap of faith!

Gus will be working at the Project until the end of May, 2020. Drop in and shoot the breeze with him! — Ed.

Kristina Waltzes In

Kristina Nungaray joined The 52nd Street Project as the Development, Communications, & Management Assistant in December. A Jill-of-All-Trades, she has worked as a Writer and a Copy Editor, and has even funneled her obsession with fun and unusual earrings into her own pop-up jewelry line. She joined The Project by way of the world of Public Relations and is so happy that she gets to go to work every day at a place that is so much fun!

Originally from Houston, Texas, Kristina was drawn to the greater New York area by her love of theater, music, and creative writing. When she is not living her best life at The Project, she is a competitive synchronized swimmer and a newbie runner who is chasing her first full marathon. She spends as much time as possible with her two dogs Jingle and Frijole, or with anyone else’s dogs she can find. She loves spending time giving back to the greater community around her and makes homemade breakfast tacos for people in need, regularly. One of her favorite things to do is cook homemade Mexican food for anyone who will let her!

Since starting at The Project, Kristina has had the pleasures of learning how to play ping pong and volunteering in the Playmaking class where she is constantly in awe of all the stellar character names that pop up. If you see her at an upcoming show, feel free to say “Hello!” She will be the one drinking a little too much coffee, laughing a little too loudly, and wearing a big smile on her face!

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AVI ARRIVES

We are delighted to welcome Avi A. Amon to the Clubhouse as our first ever on-staff Music Director. Avi first volunteered as a composer for us five years ago on the 2015 Two-on-Two's. Now he has his own desk! But let’s hear from Avi directly.

"Wow! It is such an honor to join the team here at The 52nd St. Project. I was introduced to the Project by my dear friend - and long-time volunteer - Kim Sherman, about 6 years ago. And since then, I’ve written hundreds of songs with and for Project members, in almost every program. Playmaking, One-on-One’s, Two-on-Two’s, Songmaking, Dancemaking, Filmmaking, Teen Ensemble, The PROJCast... Each one inspiring in its own way. I haven’t been able to do Playback yet, but I’ll get to that one soon - I’m sure of it. Writing with the young people here at The Project has completely shaped my process as a writer and artist and I’m really excited to continue incorporating original music into all of our programs.

"My background is in music composition and sound design, and I got my MFA in Musical Theater Writing from NYU Tisch. I teach there now, and I usually have my hands in about a dozen projects at any given moment. I’ve been lucky to develop shows (often with other artist-friends-of-the-Project) at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, New York Theater Workshop, Berkeley REP, and SoHo Rep, to name a few. More recently, I’ve been scoring films, including one that was just picked up by HBO. And some other big news! My wife, Molly, and I welcomed a baby girl into our lives in 2019. Noa is now 7 months old and teaching us all sorts of things every day. She loves Project shows, too. And just look how cute she is..."

THANKS, ALICIA!

While we are saying goodbye to one of our colleagues and hello to a couple of others, we have to express our gratitude to our former intern and terrific current volunteer and Smart Partner Alicia Moeller. Throughout the past year or so, Alicia has been filling in for us as a part-time management associate. She held down the fort smashingly until Kristina arrived. Good luck in all your future endeavors, Alicia! GB

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.

The Dubin Family Foundation.......................... $1,000
Ninth Avenue Foundation.............................. $1,000
Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta........... $1,500
Google ......................................................... $2,500
Castle Family Foundation ................................ $3,000
Consolidated Edison ..................................... $10,000
Frederick Loewe Foundation ........................... $10,000
Lilah Hilliard Fisher Foundation....................... $10,000
Pamela & Wayne Garrison Family Foundation........ $10,000
The Educational Foundation of America ............. $10,000
The Jean & Louis Dreyfus Foundation ............... $10,000
The Judy Taub Gold Fund ............................. $10,000
The Morris & Alma Schapiro Fund .................... $10,000
Susquehanna Foundation ............................... $15,000
National Endowment for the Arts ............... $20,000

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Hey, Projectiles! We’ve got our own radio show on the internet! Visit the podcast section of the iTunes Store and search for “The 52nd Street Project” or even just “PROJcast.” Then, hit “SUBSCRIBE” and start enjoying stories, plays, interviews and more on a monthly basis. See you on the Web, Deb!

THANks, Alicia!

While we are saying goodbye to one of our colleagues and hello to a couple of others, we have to express our gratitude to our former intern and terrific current volunteer and Smart Partner Alicia Moeller. Throughout the past year or so, Alicia has been filling in for us as a part-time management associate. She held down the fort smashingly until Kristina arrived. Good luck in all your future endeavors, Alicia! GB
Who can resist a medieval drama? Not young Aiden Vasquez. He wrote The Adventure of Shadowclaw and Niblehound for actors Genesis Oliver and Christian DeMarais and director Jose Gamo. It featured fierce battles, a bloodthirsty Crab General, a brotherly betrayal, and a gruesome beheading.


Joe Tapper was a killer-hunter with a TV show and Sara Ornelas a Gorgon who was his quarry in Peter Muca’s That’s a Good Burger, directed by Michael Propster.

Doris Cross presented us with a treacherous girl (Morgan Everitt) who preyed upon a classmate (Simone Recasner) in The Fake Friend and the Rich Girl, directed by Kat Almirañez.

A mouse (Lynne Rosenberg) and a scientifically-minded cat (RJ Foster) had it out in Hannah Santos’ Kitty and Stevey. Sol Crespo was the director.
A timid worm (Kyle Cameron) and a dragon ballerina (Jasminn Johnson) learned about the risks of time travel in Kal-El Alexis’ play, bluntly entitled Shame. Ben Stockman was at the helm of the piece.

We saw what happens at the microscopic level when potassium (Erin Felgar) comes into contact with bacteria (Chelsea Melone) in Xavier Valentin’s The Battle of Minerals, directed by Nick Mills.

Jon-Michael Reese learned about arachnophobia from Jake Pino in Logan Goicuria’s Bill Jr. and Barry’s Mishap-Adventure, directed by John Sheehy. The show also featured a one-man musical about dinosaurs.

A real tent on the Project stage? Yep, and Yovely Ramirez and Morgan Smalls made good use of it to air real issues with their parents in The Journey, written by Sherisse Alvarez and directed by Ciana Proto.

Garrett David Kim’s The History Project cast Amari Dubose and Angel Mendoza as a pair of schoolmates comparing notes on the values of athletic prowess and on-line notoriety. Alex J. Gould directed.

Andres Mendoza was an astronaut truffle farmer and Jayden Alvarado his robot companion in Truffle Ransom. Sathya Sridharan directed Willie Reale’s play, which held a strong environmental message.

Amirah Hancock was a superhero disguised as a presidential aide and Arden Wolfe was the president she aided in Madame President and The Golden Girl, written by Tahnee Freda and directed by Paton Ashbrook.
The golf outing took place at the beautiful Quaker Ridge Golf Club in Scarsdale, just like last year. The difference was that we had gorgeous weather! All the participants agreed that playing in blazing sunshine was far preferable to playing in cold, pouring rain. Seriously, it was a very fine day out on the links on a course that is one of the best in the world. If you love the game of golf, mark down Sept. 23, 2020 in your calendar. That's the date of the next Outing!
Glimpses of the songmaking concert

On Friday, October 25, The Five Angels Theater became an amazing concert hall that showcased the writing talents of young people from The 52nd Street Project and the musical talents of a host of adult volunteers. The event was Songmaking 2019: Take It From the Top, and it was the end product of a program run by Project Music Director Avi A. Amon (see page 4) and Program Director Garrett David Kim. Clayton Grimm assisted the program and also performed as one of the musicians in the house band.

The kid lyricists were Jayden Alvarado, Crismell Concepción, Antonella Suero Loyola, Andrew Moore, and Ayah Musa.

Their songwriting partners for the program were composers and musicians who are current MFA Music Theatre Writing candidates at NYU. The composers were Lydia Breckon, Pablo Concha, Sean Eads, Nathan Riebl, and Enzo Veiga.

The adult singers were Andrea Abello, Marinda Anderson, Jenelle Chu, Angel Desai, Alex Fernandez, Belén Moyano, Chris Murphy, Ronald Peet, Vanessa Porras, Neil Tyrone Pritchard, Jon-Michael Reese, Heath Saunders, Laura Riveros-Sefair, Michelle J. Rodriguez, Stephen Stocking, Stephen Wallem, Natalie Walker, and Samy Nour Younes.
Carisa Kelly, one of our highly esteemed costume designers, recently invited us to meet her new daughter Rosalie Leah Jones, born on Sept. 19, 2019. Rosalie is seen here with Carisa and her proud papa Kent Jones.

Ray Harold was a Project kid who went on to become a union stage carpenter and the Project’s Tech Director from 2009 to 2014. He married ace techie Melissa Shippers at the Bear Mountain Carousel on Oct. 13, 2019. It was a great party!

Clea Alsip, last seen getting married on our stage in December, 2018, is now really married. She got hitched to Danny Binstock on New Year’s Eve at a swanky Brooklyn spot called Deity. And in this dress, Clea looks like a deity!

Our old L.A. friends Jackie Chung and Louis Changchien welcomed Tyrus Koa Changchien into their lives on Oct. 10, 2019. Blue is definitely his color!

MORE former kid news: Nadya Jabour and her husband Declan Ford had a baby named Zaid James Jabour Ford. He’s about 18 months old now, but, hey, better late than never, right?
THE SPRING 2020 PLAYMAKING SHOW
10 PLAYS WRITTEN BY YOUNG PEOPLE AND PERFORMED BY ADULT ACTORS

THE 52ND STREET PROJECT PRESENTS

NATALIE HIRSCH, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
KAT ALMIRANÉZ, PLAYMAKING DIRECTOR
CAROL OCHS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SMOKE & MIRRORS
THE TRICKY PLAYS

FRIDAY, MARCH 20 AT 7:30 P.M.
SATURDAY, MARCH 21 AT 3:00 & 7:30 P.M.
SUNDAY, MARCH 22 AT 3:00 P.M.

THE FIVE ANGELS THEATER
789 10TH AVE., BETWEEN 52ND & 53RD ST.

ADMISSION FREE, BUT BE SURE TO VISIT 52PROJECT.ORG TO MAKE A RESERVATION.

ARTWORK BY LEE ROSEN
At the end of the summer of 2019, the Project hosted its 6th annual Filmmaking workshop. In the course of a week, three Project Members and their adult partners wrote and directed short films starring (mostly) adult professional actors. The Red Carpet premiere happened at the Five Angels Theater on Sept. 9.

You’ll find descriptions of the films below, but you should really WATCH them. Make some popcorn, go to www.52project.org, click on the Kid Stuff pull-down menu, hit Kid Videos and ENJOY!

Faith Villanueva created a surreal animal fairy tale to shoot with her fellow director Grace Rex. Emily Fury Daly and our own Kat Almirante were among the actors in the piece.

Aaron Ordinola and Michael Propster shot an apparent homage to Indiana Jones. Above are Eric Harper and Henry Jenkinson in a groundbreaking (for the Project) green-screen effect.

Hannah Leon and her partner Meredith Dobbs gave us an eerie flick about two girls who sneak into a theater that is kind of haunted! Seen here: Helen Cespedes and Maryn Pearl Shaw.

The last presentation of 2019 was Wordplay, a program that features spoken-word pieces created by the young members of the Project. This year’s edition was entitled Push Your Luck, and everyone that attended the performance on Dec. 13 was very lucky indeed. Below, the faces of the kids and the adults who participated.

Wordplay was made possible by Wordplay Directors Garrett Kim and Corey Ruzicano, Intern Evan Schultz, Stage Manager Jaclyn Pagau, Lighting Designer Sayantee Sahoo, and Composer Avi A. Amon.
SNAPZ!

Behind the scenes at The 52nd Street Project

While on the Cold Spring Playmaking trip (see p. 5), Doris Cross and teen counselor Karen Tineo found time for a canoe ride on Pursch Pond.

Natalie Hirsch, our artistic director, may seem pretty sweet in her curtain speeches, but here is a glimpse of the REAL Nat on the job. Man, she is tough!

While everybody else fools around, Sayantee Sahoo and Greg MacPherson keep focusing lights on the grid.

It takes a village to run a Ping-Pong Tournament (see p. 7). John Sheehy was the referee for every game as intern Ana Soto and Kat Almirañez kept score in their "Fish Fezzes."

What he does for us- Mark Whatley has been a member of our Board of Directors since April, 2014 and an avid participant in the Project’s Golf Outing (see p. 7) since 2010.

Occupation- Investment Banker

Why he does what he does- "I enjoy working as a team to help clients solve complex issues."

Hobbies- "Ice hockey, travel, three small kids."

Last book read- "What It Takes by Steve Schwarzman."

Most recent accomplishment- "Learned how to play ice hockey and lived through Father/Son hockey camp this past summer."

Best Project Memory- "One of the highlights of our year is seeing the kids perform or their bodies of work performed at the annual Gala."

Credo- "In everything that you do - Learn, Earn and Return."

Advice to kids- "Success in life can mean many different things, but it is never given, it is always earned."

Place of birth- "Houston, Texas."

Habitat- "Rye, NY."

Favorite thing about the Project- "The kids, it's all about the kids."

On Flyer Bars- "I'm one of those weird people that doesn't like chocolate."