



PROJECT UPDATE

FULL-COLOR WEB EDITION • VOL. 84 - MARCH, 2020 • GEORGE BABIAK, EDITOR

PLAYBACK OCTOBER, 2019
YOUNG PEOPLE WRITE PLAYS FOR THEMSELVES TO PERFORM WITH ADULTS



1



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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**.

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 BRIDGEHAMPTON HOST FAMILIES

Alex Gersten-Vassilaros, Louis & Patrice Friedman, and Cathy Dantchik.



4



5



6

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

TWO-ON-TWO PHOTOGRAPHS BY WINSTON RODNEY

PLAYBACK ROUND-UP, CONTINUED:



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!

GR

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



Swan Lake Song?



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 and open water 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!

KN

AVI ARRIVES



Avi, Molly, and Noa

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..."

AAA

THANKS, ALICIA!

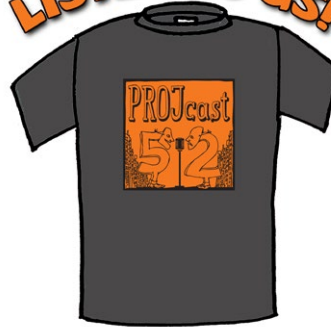


While we are saying goodbye to one of our colleagues and hello to a couple of others, we have to express our gratitude to our former intern and terrific current volunteer and Smart Partner **Alicia Moeller**. Throughout the

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

LISTEN TO US!



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!



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



FALL PLAYMAKING
NOV. 2019 - YOUNG PEOPLE WRITE, ADULTS PERFORM

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.

UPSIDE-DOWN: THE TOPSY TURVY PLAYS
The Fall 2019 Playmaking Shows

Our newest Members, all around 10 years old, start their Project lives by writing plays that are performed by adult professional actors. *Upside-Down* had its run at the Five Angels Theater Nov. 22-24.

THE DESIGN AND TECH TEAM

Avi A. Amon Composer/Maestro
 Lily Prentice Costumes
 Greg MacPherson Lighting
 Stephen Galvan Sound
 Jenni Swan Stage Manager
 Kim D. Sherman Chef

THE COLD SPRING, PA. HOST FAMILIES

David and Deborah Pursch (Main House), Bill & Linda Cobb, Roberta & Vince Conroy, Bill & Linda Halvorsen, James & Heather Hogan-Spencer, Katy Homans & Patterson Sims, Ryanne & Jim Jennings, Robin & Jim Sampson, and Jim & Pat Sanders.



Students **Crystal Dickinson** and **Tina Chilip** turned in *The Science Project That Would Change Your Life*, by **Arianna Casiano**. **Christina Roussos** directed.



Adventurer **Leta Renée-Alan** and pumpkin-headed donkey **KeilLyn Durrel Jones** sought treasure in *The Lost Land of Gold*, by **Sophia LaCotera**. **Estefanía Fadul** directed.



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.

PLAYMAKING RECAP, CONTINUED:



A timid worm (**Kyle Cameron**) and a dragon ballerina (**Jasminn Johnson**) learned about the risks of time travel in **Kal-EI 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.

ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: PLAYS YOU CAN'T IGNORE

The 2020 2-on-2's

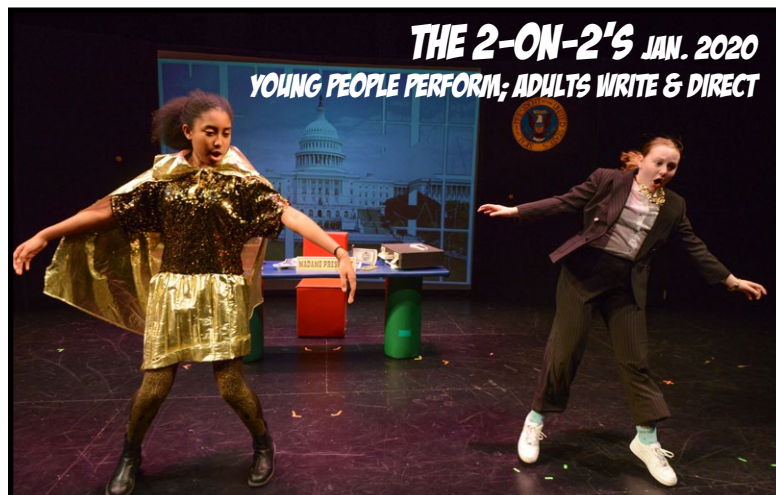
Each January, members who are 13 or 14 years old are cast in the 2-on-2's, shows in which two young people take stage by themselves for the first time with the support of an adult playwright and an adult director. It happened Jan. 24-26.

THE DESIGN AND TECH TEAM

Erato Kremmyda..... Composer/Maestro
 Paula Cohen..... Costume Designer
 Greg MacPherson Lighting Designer
 Stephen Galvan..... Sound Designer
 Jenni Swan..... Stage Manager

THE ROCKLAND COUNTY HOST FAMILIES

Wendy vanden Heuvel, Brian Mertes, and Melissa Kievman;
 Susanna Styron; Polly King and John-Paul Newport.



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**.



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.

2-ON-2 PHOTOS BY WINSTON RODNEY

THE SPORTS PAGE

The Annual 52nd Street Project Golf Outing - Sept 25, 2019



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!



◀ Board Co-chair **Louis Friedman** displayed perfect form.



Board member **Bob Goldberg** is no slouch at hitting a ball either.



A star-studded team: actors **John Ellison Conlee** and **Billy Crudup**, Proj Staffer **Ahmed Attia**, and **Daniel LaVecchia**.



The Project's Development Director **Kali Crandall** wanted to drive this sweet ride home.

GOLF OUTING PHOTOS BY GRB

The Annual 52nd Street Project Ping-Pong Tournament - January 29, 2020



THE CHAMPIONS
"SUPER HIP TURTLE GRANDPARENTS."
Sathya Sridharan & Stevens Velasquez



2ND PLACE
"CATCH 'EM ALL"
George Babiak & Karen Tineo



3RD PLACE
"N.A.G."
Nikolai Alvarez & Alex J. Gould



4TH PLACE
"THE SUPERNATURALS"
Cody Wilson & Carlos Jimenez



5TH PLACE
"THE RIM BREAKERS"
Ahmed Shabana & Ruffin Prentiss III



HONORABLE MENTION
"THE PEOPLE"
Xavier Espinal & Ronald Peet



WACKIEST TEAM
"JAYVA"
Jayleen Velez & Daiva Deupree



MOST IMPROVED
"LE PING AND LE PONG"
Ashley Marie Ortiz & Rosneyr Rosario



BEST NEW PLAYERS
Kaytie Gil & Hannah Santos



BEST TEAM NAME
"KNIGHTS OF THE BLOOD OATH"
Mitchell Winter & Alex Torres



BEST DRESSED
"THE DOCTOR PHILS"
John Muca & Kyle Fitzgerald



GOOD SPORTS
"THE HI-FIVES"
Jai-Lyzz Rodriguez & Sam Dash

PING-PONG PHOTOS BY THOMAS FINEGAR

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 Riebli**, 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**.



Andrew



Natalie W.



Jenelle, Neil, and the band.



Jayden



Ronald



Angel



Ayah



Lydia



Crismell



Clayton



Sean



Antonella

SONGMAKING PHOTOS BY RYAN NAVA

MEGABITS



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!



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!



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**.



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!

BIG KIDS BASH 2019

The Project's "Big Kids" are the party animal contingent of our supporters. This year's Big Kids Bash took place on the same night as the Songmaking event (see previous page). The theme for the Bash was "A Little Bit West of Broadway" and staging mock Playbill covers was the fave activity of the evening. Below, from left: **Jessica Savage**, **Kyle Cameron**, **Stephen Stocking**, **Lynne Rosenberg**, **Kerry Warren**, and Proj staffers **Ahmed Attia**, **Caylyn Wan-Creager**, and **Alicia Moeller**.



Those Big Kids really take the cake!



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 52ND STREET PROJECT PRESENTS

THE SPRING 2020
PLAYMAKING SHOW

10 PLAYS WRITTEN
BY YOUNG PEOPLE
AND PERFORMED
BY ADULT ACTORS

NATALIE HIRSCH,
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

KAT ALMIRANEZ,
PLAYMAKING DIRECTOR

CAROL OCHS,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



ARTWORK BY LEE ROSEN

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

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.

THE 52ND STREET PROJECT PRESENTS

FILMMAKING WEEK 2019



3
NEW FILMS BY
FAITH VILLANUEVA
AARON ORDINOLA
AND
HANNAH LEON

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!**

THE WAY OUT



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

ANCIENT SPEAR OF THE COLOSSEUM



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.

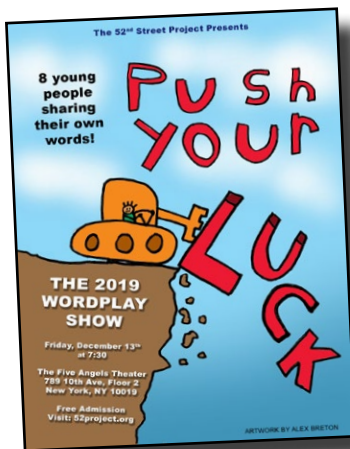
DAY AT ABANDONED THEATER



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**.

FACES OF WORDPLAY

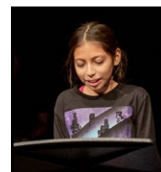
The last presentation of 2019 was *Wordplay*, a program that features spoken-word pieces created by the young members of the Project. This year's edition was entitled *Push Your Luck*, and everyone that attended the performance on Dec. 13 was very lucky indeed. Below, the faces of the kids and the adults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



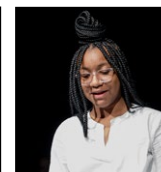
Jen Anaya



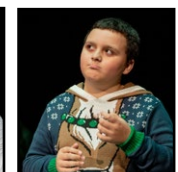
Lanai Blake-Soden



Hanna Brea



Kailey Caton



Ethan Cruz



Madeline DeFreece



Nehassaiu DeGannes



Alex De La Rosa



Ian Edlund



Talia Heller



Mat Hostetter



Charlie O'Rourke



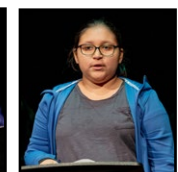
Marcelle Orozco



Chyanne Peña



Jojo Perez



Jai-Lyzz Rodriguez

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

Flyer Bar Profile



Mark Whatley

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."

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."