



# PROJECT UPDATE

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## PROJECT MEMBERS ARE UNDAUNTED

This is an incredibly difficult time for all of us, but it is especially challenging for the young people of **New York City**, who have been forced to isolate themselves from their schools, daily routines, pastimes, playgrounds, and even their friends. **The 52nd Street Project**, which has been an artistic community serving the young residents of **Hell's Kitchen** since 1981, is treating this as an opportunity to bring our blend of arts, education, and fun into the homes of our members and keep them learning, loving, and laughing. Please read on and see how we're adapting our big, sweeping programs to small, glowing screens.



Just a few of the things our staff and volunteers have been doing with members lately:

1. **Armando Riesco** and **Shirley Rumierk** appeared in Virtual Playmaking 1.
2. **Shadel** made a t-shirt for herself.
3. **Aiden** learned *Secrets of Drawing Faces*.
4. **Avi** and **Garrett** started a Songmaking class.
5. **Caylyn** demonstrated how to draw a well-proportioned figure to the Artmakers.
6. Virtual Playmaking 2, this time with **Kate Abbruzzese** and **AJ Shively** on a farm!
7. Smart Partners **Marielle**, **Maria**, **Sarah**, and **Tiffany** put things on their heads.



**MUCH MORE INSIDE! KEEP ON READING.**

# "GAME CHANGERS" LIVES UP TO ITS NAME



The 52nd Street Project's Annual Gala has long been a great party, but it has also long been a crucial source of our operating funds. When Broadway shut down in March, we knew we would have to find a new way to put on a terrific show that could raise our much-needed funds. And we did! Enter *Game Changers, The 2020 Virtual Gala*.

Over four weeks in April and May, 2020, the Game Changers site released 10 music videos featuring some of our favorite singers and artists performing songs with lyrics written by our young members. Under the direction of **Avi A. Amon** and with the aid of producer **Noël Mihalow** (see her Flyer Bar Profile on p. 9) the actors rose to creative heights in their homes as they costumed, choreographed, and shot their videos, which became small masterpieces. **Bobby Cannavale** and **Rose Byrne** kicked

off each film with witty homebound repartee. Avi composed the music except where otherwise noted.

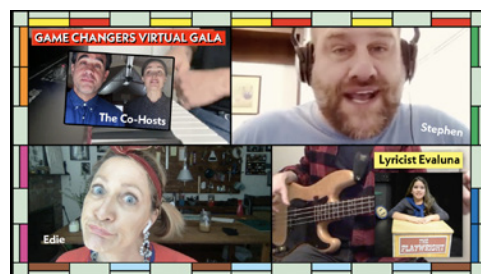
*Game Changers* could not have happened without our Event Producer **Kali Crandall**, staff members **Carol Ochs**, **John Sheehy**, **Natalie Hirsch**, **Kristina Nungaray**, and **George Babiak**, and design consultant **Iris A. Brown**. — GRB



**Mallory Portnoy** delivered a rock anthem called *Anything* by **Kylee**, who wrote the lyrics at the age of 10.



**Michael Potts** sang *Worst Water Ever* with lyrics by **Andrew** and music by **Sean Eads**.



**Edie Falco** and **Stephen Wallem** did *Evaluna's / Got a Friend in Me*, which they did onstage for us in 2017.



**Joe Tapper** and **Annaleigh Ashford** performed *Peter's Cheeseburgers*, from *Playmaking* in December.



**Natalie Walker** performed *Dreamland*, a one-woman opera written by **Ayah** with music by **Enzo Veiga**.



**Shirley Rumierk** and **Robin de Jesús** sang *I Like Havana*. Lyrics by **Crismell**, music by **Pablo Concha**.



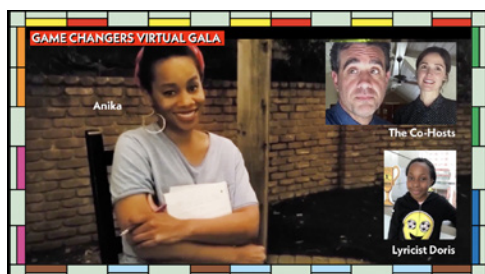
**Adrienne C. Moore** and **Marinda Anderson** touched us all with *Hannah's Playmaking* song, *BBFF*.



**Belén Moyano** gave us the eerie *Spirit Skeleton*, with lyrics by **Antonella** and music by **Lydia Breckon**.



**Bradley Dean**, **Heath Saunders**, and **Jon-Michael Reese** performed a totally electric *Rockstar* with lyrics by **Jayden** and music by **Nathan Riebli**.



**Anika Noni Rose** brought *Game Changers* home with the very moving *I Want a Friend*. The lyrics were written by young **Doris** for her *Playmaking* show in 2019.

Wish you'd seen it?  
You still can!  
All of these videos  
are still visible at  
[give.52project.org/GameChangers](http://give.52project.org/GameChangers)  
There's no charge to  
see them, but if  
you can make a  
donation, we'd be  
very grateful!

# ALSO APPEARING ON OUR VIRTUAL STAGE



Every Gala or Benefit has a few speeches, and we're lucky enough to have a good bunch of orators. Kicking off the event were comedian and old friend **Lewis Black** and the co-chairs of our Board of Directors, **Cathy Dantchik** and **Louis Friedman**.



The songs were all very moving, but nothing affects us quite as much as former Project members telling us what growing up at The 52nd Street Project meant to them. **Chyanne Peña**, **Karen Tineo**, and **Sofia Santoni** all tugged at our heartstrings.



**Nicole A. Watson** is a successful director who started her career as an intern at the Project and **Ruben Santiago-Hudson** is an award-winning actor, director, and playwright. They both had a lot of really nice things to say about us and our honorees, **Crystal Dickinson** and **Brandon Dirden**.



**Crystal** and **Brandon** were, of course, the guests of honor of the Game Changers event. They certainly changed our game for the better when they started volunteering for us back in 2007. They dressed impeccably and gave a heartfelt speech that made our eyes mist up quite a bit.



Hi, P.U. Readers! 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 year-round.

The CLAWS Foundation.....	\$100,000	Morgan Stanley Philanthropies.....	\$7,500
New York Community Trust, NYC COVID-19 Response & Impact Fund ....	\$75,000	The Gaffigan Family Foundation in honor of The Imagine Society .....	\$5,650
Pinkerton Foundation.....	\$50,000	Tiger Baron Foundation .....	\$5,000
Cantor Fitzgerald Relief Fund.....	\$35,000	Google .....	\$2,500
Distracted Globe Foundation.....	\$30,000	The Rona & Randolph M. Nelson Foundation .....	\$2,000
The Dawkins Family Foundation .....	\$15,000	Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta .....	\$1,500
Frederick Loewe Foundation.....	\$10,000	Signature Bank .....	\$1,000
National Philanthropic Trust		Brooklyn Community Foundation .....	\$1,000
Judy Taub Gold Fund.....	\$10,000		
Persephone Foundation.....	\$10,000		

## VIRTUAL PLAYMAKING

Since the pandemic began, **Kat Almirañez** (right) has already held two Playmaking classes on Zoom that led to online performances of plays written by young people.



The roles were cast with volunteers who were couples or roommates, making it possible for them to act in the same room with each other. The ambitious actors scrounged costumes from their closets, made their own props, and even provided virtual backgrounds and slide projections. Round two even had composers!

### VIRTUAL PM 1 - APRIL 15



#### PLAYMAKING 1 PARTICIPANTS

**Project Member Playwrights:** Tremaine, Arianna, Logan, John, Jojo, and Faith.

**Class Volunteers:** Molly Carden, Carina Goebelbecker, Korey Jackson, Jimmy Kenna, Ryan Spahn, and Kea Trevett.

**Actors:** Paton Ashbrook, Oscar Cabrera, Michael Frederic, Zabryna Guevara, KeiLyn Durrell Jones, Natalie Marshall-Hirsch, Maggie Odette, Ashley Marie Ortiz, Armando Riesco, Shirley Rumierk, Sathya Sridharan, and Chris Wight.

### VIRTUAL PM 2 - MAY 13



#### PLAYMAKING 2 PARTICIPANTS

**Project Member Playwrights:** Christian, Daniel, Doris, Jai-Lyzz, Kaytie, and Sophia.

**Director/Dramaturges:** Nolan Doran, Chelsea Hackett, Kristina Nungaray, Rachel Pickup, Gus Reale, & James Yaegashi.

**Actors:** Kate Abbruzzese, Elli Brown, Zoe Chao, Veronica Chernitska, Daiva Deupree, Jose Gamo, Jack Mikesell, Evan Schultz, AJ Shively, Ana Soto, Kathy Staats, David Starry, & Matt Wilkas.

**Composers:** Wes Braver, Kim Sherman, Zonia Tsang, & Danny Ursetti.

## VIRTUAL TEEN ENSEMBLE

You might think **Kat** had her hands full with the Playmaking classes and shows above. Well, she certainly DID, but she has also continued running the weekly Teen Ensemble. The

teens have had their hands full, too, having to finish their school work and take their finals while hunkering down at home.

As they did at the Clubhouse, the teens have kept up creating characters, writing scenes, and just plain sharing their lives and experiences with each other. At this writing, their next creative foray will be puppetry. We expect to see at least one tragedy about a sock who has lost its mate. – *George*



## VIRTUAL RADIOMAKING

At the end of March, the four high school seniors who had signed on to Radiomaking pre-shelter-in-place met and agreed that they wanted to move forward with the program. The Radiomaking curriculum was adapted to a virtual format, and we streamlined our goals to reflect the interests of the Project Members. As a group, we



Garrett

listened to podcasts, developed pitches for pieces, and talked with long-time vol and expert interviewer **Therese Barbato**. With virtual support from volunteers **Lynne Marie Rosenberg**, **Kerry Warren**, **Ashley Marie Ortiz**, and **Jacqueline Raymond** (first time vol!), everyone has homed in on their idea for their nonfiction radio story and conducted interviews. The pieces are now in the editing phase, and we hope to finish the stories in June. – *Garrett*



Day one of Virtual Radiomaking

## LISTEN TO US!



Curious about what the Radiomaking pieces sound like? You can hear the results for yourself as they are gradually released on the **PROJcast**.

Go to the podcast section of the iTunes Store and search for “The 52nd Street Project” or even just “PROJcast.”

When you see the bold, orange **Shel Silverstein/Iris Brown** logo you see at left, hit “SUBSCRIBE” and start enjoying stories, plays, interviews and more on a monthly basis. See you on the Web, Deb!

## VIRTUAL SONGMAKING



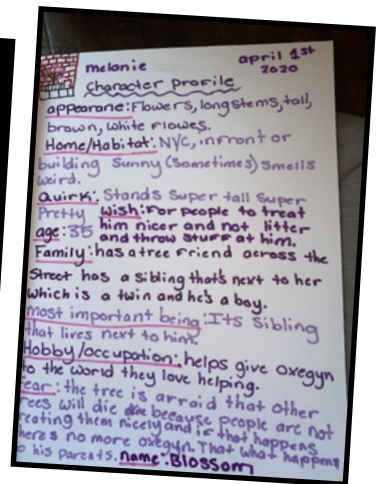
For about 6 weeks, a small group of Project Members have been meeting regularly with Music Director **Avi Amon** (above) and Program Director **Garrett Kim** for our first ever virtual Songmaking program!

As a group, we’re sharing some of our favorite songs with each other, talking about music, and doing writing activities, song shares, and individual work sessions with Avi. Avi, who is tireless and relentlessly creative, is

composing for all the members. At the moment, we are in the home stretch of the songwriting process, and we’ll let you know how and when you can check out the finished songs. – *Garrett*



Above, left:: Xavier and Avi using Zoom to communicate and create music to fit Xavier’s words. Right: Melanie’s character profile for her song.



Find out for yourself how good songs written by young Project Members can be!  
Click below to visit our gala site featuring Songmaking and Playmaking performances:

[give.52project.org/GameChangers](http://give.52project.org/GameChangers)

## VIRTUAL ARTMAKING

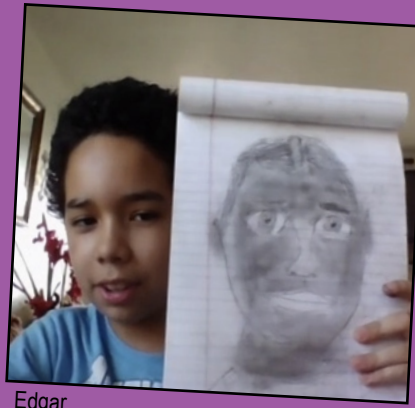


One way to get better at drawing: teach a class in it! That's what we (**Caylyn** and **George**) decided after teaching Artmaking to two groups of our members in April and May.

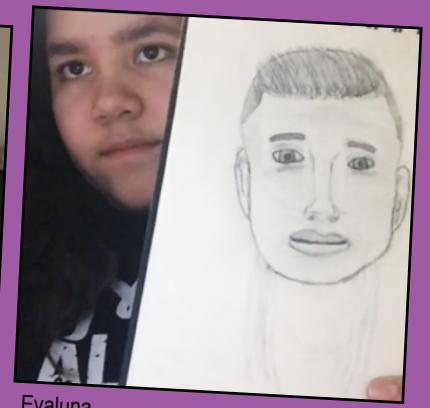
The class was organized into eight sessions:

1. Fast and Furious Sketching
2. Fonts, Lettering, and Logos
3. Basic shapes and 3-D solids
4. Secrets of Drawing Faces
5. Secrets of Drawing Figures
6. Get Some Perspective!
7. Don't be a Square! Be a Cubist!
8. Wow, that's surreal (ism)!

Our skills improved dramatically, but our excellent students outdid us by miles. At right, a sampling of the studies creating in Secrets of Drawing Faces. – *George*



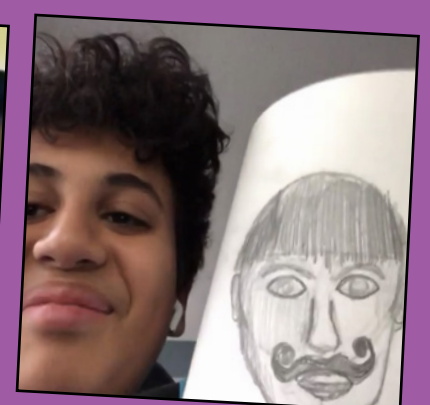
Edgar



Evaluna



Hannah



Jayden

## VIRTUAL PLAYBACK



Playback, normally an Autumn production, gets a jumpstart this year as **Natalie Marshall-Hirsch** oversees a group of young teens who are writing plays for themselves to perform with adult partners. When done, the plays will be given stylishly staged readings on the indispensable Zoom platform.

## VIRTUAL FREE TIME



Sometimes kids just need to horse around! Twice a week, we hold **Free Time** for an hour, where members get to hang out with their peers and the Project staff and play games like Hangman, 20 Questions, and Connect 4. It is a space much like the Clubhouse, where kids can have fun and be themselves. – *Johanna*

## VIRTUAL WORDPLAY



Wordplay is meeting every other week with a group of 6 members with 2 vols (**Jen Anaya** & **Talia Heller**) and sessions led by **Corey Ruzicano**. We start 3 new poems every session, so by the end of the program, everyone will have started 9 pieces! We're planning on wrapping up the program at the beginning of June with a small, closed sharing of their writing.

Overall, we have gotten to focus on process this spring, taking things slow and shaping what each week looks like as we go along. – *Garrett*



WordPlay appears to generate a healthy number of smiles!

# THE BRIDGEHAMPTON PLAYMAKERS

Our most popular shows of the year are probably the Fall and Spring Playmaking productions. The combination of scripts written by 10-year olds with adult professional acting skills is irresistible. It should come as no surprise, however, that *Smoke and Mirrors*, the show we'd scheduled for the weekend of March 20-22, had to be cancelled due to the pandemic.

Fortunately, our young Playmakers had already been able to travel with us to Bridgehampton, Long Island for the playwriting retreat. They were able to play in our host **Alexandra Vassilaros'** huge yard, bowl at **Wildwood Lanes** in Riverhead, experience the remarkable cooking of **Chef John Sheehy**, and hear their final drafts read by the adults on the trip.

As for the shows, which we left in a partially rehearsed state, we still have plans to stage them in the future. So keep an eye out for *Smoke and Mirrors!* – *George*



The Spring Playmakers



Lining up for pancakes carefully doled out by Garrett and Carol.

## IN MEMORIAM



### BERNARD GERSTEN

JANUARY 30, 1923 – APRIL 27, 2020

The Project mourns the loss of **Bernard Gersten**, whom most will remember as the Associate Producer of the **New York Shakespeare Festival** from 1960 to 1978, the Executive Director of **Lincoln Center Theater** from 1986 to 2013 and the winner of 16 Tony awards, including one for Lifetime Achievement.

We at the Project, however, will always remember Bernie as the dad of **Jenny Gersten** (who worked at the Project from 1990 to 1996), the beloved mentor of our Executive Director **Carol Ochs**, a loyal supporter (with his wife **Cora Cahan**) of the Project for decades, and the fellow that loaned us one of Lincoln Center's theaters for our 10th Anniversary gala in 1991. Farewell, old friend.

### BILL MUDDYMAN

DECEMBER 27, 1937 – MAY 6, 2020

We recently heard of the passing of **Bill Muddyman**, a dear old friend of the Project, from his daughter **Jane Obadia** (also a dear friend). Bill was best known in the United Kingdom for his involvement in the ownership and management of the **Fulham Football Club**. In fact, he is widely credited with saving the famous team from extinction in the late 80's and remained on the board until the early 2000's.

To the Project, Bill was the remarkable man who hosted Teen Ensembles at his **Chateau de Berne** estate and vineyard in Provence no less than five times. Those were amazing, life-changing trips for the teens who were lucky enough to perform Shakespeare in France AND learn the art of being a sommelier from Bill. We will miss you, sir.





Project pals **Dylan Dawson** and **Heather Robb** had a pandemic wedding. Dylan says: "We got married on Saturday, May 2nd in (Proj Vol) **Darcy Fowler's** backyard in Los Angeles. We had just a few friends there to witness (all safely six feet apart) while everyone else tuned in on a YouTube livestream. Our moms FaceTimed in to do poetry readings. Honestly, it was perfect."



Many readers may remember **Alyssa Anderson Kuntz**, who once held the title of Manager of Individual Giving here at the Project. She's lived in Nashville for some time now and on April 25, she and her husband **Matt** had a baby daughter they named **Evelyn**. Congrats, Alyssa!

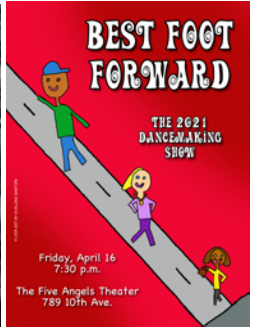
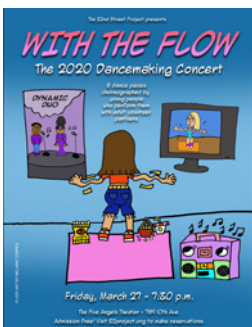
## MEGABITS • MEGABITS • MEGABITS



**Katie Meister**, a volunteer from way back, delivered **Marcus Alexander Houben** on March 25, 2020 at New York-Presbyterian Brooklyn Methodist Hospital in Park Slope while the partner ban was still in effect. Katie writes: "I found out right before going into the operating room that my husband would be able to participate virtually - a huge relief to us. The first picture is right after Marcus was born with my husband, **Gertjan**, and my older son, **Wim**, on the phone. It is a picture we are really proud of. The second is of us quarantining at home in Brooklyn."

Project composer and writer **Matt Schatz** and **Jenna Hymes** welcomed **Harriet Eve Schatz** into their lives on March 12 in Los Angeles.

## POSTERS DESIGNED BY YOUNG PEOPLE



Above, posters designed for New Platforms shows by **Melanie, Antonella, Alex, Love, Laila, and Evaluna** in our February Artmaking workshop. Sadly, some of these have had to be postponed, but we plan to use the artwork when we reopen.



# FLYER BAR PROFILE



**NOËL MIHALOW**

**What she does for us-** Noël Mihalow has been a friend of the Project since the summer of 1993, when she operated a slide projector for the One-on-Ones. She graduated to stage manager for a myriad of shows, including our Teen Ensemble's Midsummer Night's Dream tour in France in 2000. She has been on our Board of Directors since 2002 and most recently donated her impressive skills as a filmmaker and editor by producing all the music videos for the Game Changers Virtual Gala (see p. 2).

**Occupation-** Filmmaker and President of Prime Films.

**Why she does what she does-** "Everything I do is meaningful to me. Family, my company, my work with The 52nd Street Project. They all bring me joy and fulfillment."

**Hobbies-** "Who has time for hobbies? I have a long list for when I retire!"

**Last book read-** "Becoming by Michelle Obama."

**Most recent accomplishment-** "Helping create the videos for The 52nd Street Project Virtual Gala!"

**Best Project Memory-** "There are so many amazing memories with the Project. But if I had to pick, the Teen Ensemble trip to France was a highlight."

**Credo-** "The more you give, the more you get."

**Advice to kids-** "Always keep your exuberance and excitement for life, this will shape your perspective in a positive way."

**Place of birth-** "West Point, NY."

**Habitat-** "NEW YORK CITY (and Fire Island in the summer)."

**Favorite thing about the Project-** "The kids. And the people - the staff and volunteers. It's an incredible community."

**On Flyer Bars-** "They are the best chocolate bars I've ever had. Nothing better."

## THE KEVIN GEER MEN'S DRESSING ROOM



Kevin, in his signature hat.



John Sheehy and Kevin in *The Boxer and the Dancer* (2004).



Edie Falco, Lori Tan-Chinn, and Willie Reale unveil the plaque.

The last event before Coronavirus in which Projectiles could actually mingle happened on Sunday, March 1. It was the dedication of the **Kevin Geer Men's Dressing Room**, an evening billed as *Pizza, Beer, and Kevin Geer*. Many Project vets came by to grab a slice and a brew and reminisce over Kevin's many comic turns with us as well as his prodigious list of roles on other stages. **Edie Falco** (*The Sopranos*, *Nurse Jackie*), who shared the stage with Kevin in the many incarnations of *Sideman*, including the Broadway run, was the main speaker. Also present were **Lori Tan Chinn** (*Orange is the New Black*, and *Awkwafina is Nora from Queens*), a friend of Kevin's from way back, and The 52nd Street Project's founder **Willie Reale**. We lost Kevin in 2017, but are happy to finally honor him in a permanent way. – George