



PROJECT UPDATE

FULL-COLOR ONLINE EDITION • VOL. 86 - NOVEMBER, 2020 • GEORGE BABIAK, EDITOR

REELING AND ROLLING

Well, the pandemic rages on. Like the rest of **New York City**, we're reeling with the shock but still rolling along. We're continuing the same after-school online programs for young people that we started in the Spring but with some new additions, most notably a brand-new in-person endeavor we call **Project College**.

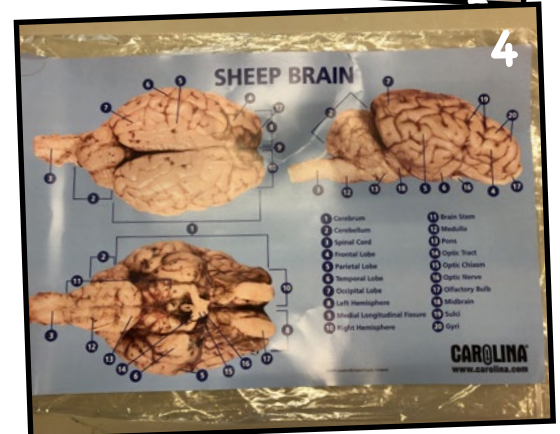


Over the summer, we learned that many of our older alumni were going to continue their college classes, but in a restrictive online format. Executive Director **Carol Ochs** had a brainstorm: why not open up the **Clubhouse** in a very limited, and very safe, fashion by allowing our college-age members to

come here to study and do their Zoom classes? We began Project College in September and found that our young adult members were grateful to be able to leave their apartments for a while to work in a spacious and tranquil environment that also provided reliable Wi-Fi access.

Most of the Project College sessions have been very quiet and serious, with students like **Chyanne Peña** (1) and **Edison Sibri** (2) focused on their screens and textbooks. **Jenisse Bouret** (5), however, who is majoring in **Speech-Language Pathology** at **Lehman College CUNY**, shook things up by asking if she could use our workshop to dissect a sheep's brain! Naturally, we said yes. Jenisse came with everything she needed, including protective gear and an illustrative dissection mat (4). She had no qualms about picking up the brain and slicing away (3). It was the best live show seen at the Project since January.

Read on, Project Fan, and see the other things we've been up to since our last newsletter. ♦

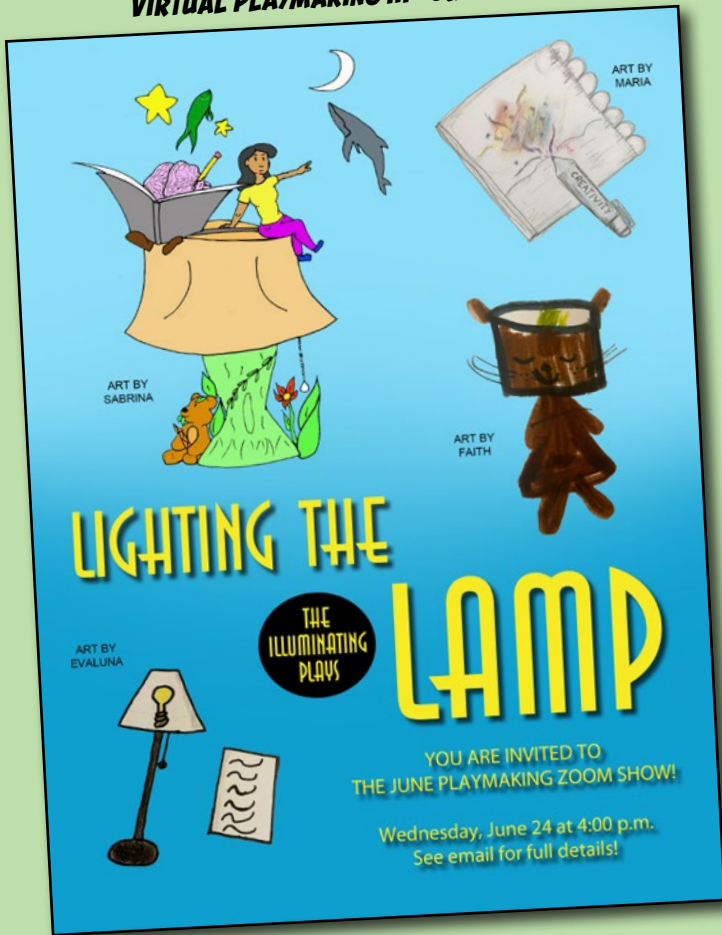


VIRTUAL PLAYMAKING

After two smash virtual productions in the Spring, Kat Almirañez (right) led two more Playmaking classes on Zoom that resulted in online performances of plays written by young people. This time, the two shows had themes and show flyers, as Project productions always should. ♦



VIRTUAL PLAYMAKING III - JUNE 24



Spinning The Web Participants

The Plays and their Playwrights:

“The Digger” by Andrew Moore, age 11

“Rabbits and Turtles” by Gavin Kent, age 11

“Manure Doesn’t Smell That Bad” by Lanai Blake-Soden, age 12

“The Fortnite God” by Matthew Berrios, age 10

“In, Out, and Through” by Olive Moayed, age 11

Class Volunteers: Angel Desai, Devin Haqq, Tim J. Lord, Colette Robert, Kerry Warren

Actors: Bill Camp, Silas Camp, Ka-Ling Cheung, Tom Gough, Korey Jackson, Toussaint Jeanlouis, Elizabeth Marvel, Teddi Milan, Joe Osheroff, Louisa Sermol, Saamer Usmani

Composers: Avi Amon, Jacinth Greywoode, Teresa Lotz, Rona Siddiqui, Richie Walter

Lighting The Lamp Participants

The Plays and their Playwrights:

“The Dojo” by Derek Rey, age 16

“Porkchop Lettuce” by Melanie Correa, age 12

“Gardens in 2050” by Tiffany Yam, age 12

“The Argue” by Xavier Valentin, age 11

“Enemies 2 Friends” by Loyal Jones, age 12

“It All Started with Coffee and Tea” by Sarah Lopez, age 13

“Title (That’s the Name)” by Xavier Espinal, age 12

Class Volunteers: Andrea Abello, Christian DeMarais, Ceci Fernandez, Rachel Lin, Brisa Muñoz, Charlie O’Rourke, Evan Schultz, John Sheehy

Actors: Niki Chernitska, Jenelle Chu, Annabelle Cousins, Biko Eisen-Martin, Eston Fung, Steven Lee Johnson, Rose Meriam, Joey Santia, Ana Gonzalez Soto, Conor Proft, Gregory Stone, Cody Wilson, Kara Young, Marielle Young

Composers: Rachel Dean, Kim Jinhyoung, Katie Madison, Eric March, Cody Owen Stine, Stephen Stocking, Enzo Vieg

VIRTUAL PLAYMAKING IV - JULY 31





SIDEWALK SCHOLARSHIP PARTY

In August, the Project customarily throws a “Scholarship Party” for its college-age alumni. Usually, it’s an actual party with barbecue-style food that culminates in the distribution of Project scholarship checks. This year, however, the pandemic precluded the party, but we did have a safely distanced streetside gathering at the Project’s front door. We handed out the scholarships and some very nice bedding and dorm room supplies courtesy of **Dormify, Inc.** ♦

(Above, three of our recipients with a couple of scholarly staff members and at right, Karen and Chyanne with their Dormify goodies).



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 Stephen P. Hanson Family Foundation.....	\$40,000	Carol M. & Stephen E. Canter Family Foundation.....	\$5,000
The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation ...	\$33,000	The Henlopen Foundation.....	\$5,000
Seller-Lehrer Family Foundation.....	\$25,000	Lazard, Ltd	\$2,500
The Shubert Foundation.....	\$20,000	Carnegie Corporation of New York	\$2,400
Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation	\$20,000	NYC & Company Foundation’s Borough Culture Grant	\$2,000
Frederick Loewe Foundation.....	\$10,000	The Dubin Family Foundation	\$1,000
Federal Home Loan Grant.....	\$10,000		



VIRTUAL PLAYBACK

Playback is an advanced form of Playmaking in which members who are about age 13 write plays for themselves to perform with adult partners. It is normally an Autumn production but Artistic Director and Playback teacher **Natalie Marshall-Hirsch** (sipping her tea in the logo above) gave the class an early jumpstart and staged not one, but TWO Zoom productions! Here's how the rosters shaped up.

Note: Each of the adult co-stars also served as the dramaturg/director for their young partner.

Playback I - May 22

"Mount Olaska" by Alex Torres, age 13
Co-starring Michael Propster

"Sitting on the Sidelines" by Amari DuBose, age 14
Co-starring Ronald Peet

"How I Won the Cook-Out" by Gilbert Rosario, age 14
Co-starring Jose-Maria Aguila

"We're All In This Together" by Cassandra Sinchi, age 12
Co-starring Eliza Huberth

"Water and Wind Are the Best Elements"
by Lanai Blake-Soden, age 12
Co-starring Madeline DeFreece

"Two Friends, Two Sisters" by Quilvis Medina, age 12
Co-starring Angelica Toledo

Playback II - August 13

"Into the Labyrinth" by Aaron Ordinola, age 13
Co-starring Keshav Moodliar

"Extraordinary Talents, Extraordinary Bonds"
by Hannah Leon, age 13
Co-starring Kendall Cafaro

"The Fisherman and the Gamer" by Ivan Garcia, age 13
Co-starring Cody Wilson

"The Different Friendship" by Jade Johnson, age 14
Co-starring Leta Renée-Alan

"Glizzy Gobbla" by Joel Gokalp, age 13
Co-starring Alex J. Gould

"It's Just Business" by Xavier Espinal, age 12
Co-starring Marchánt Davis

Natalie had this to say after the two productions: "I was so impressed with the final sharings. Throughout the process, it was hard to get participants to keep their videos on while they were writing their plays. But when it was the day of the sharing, they all happily turned on their video and fully committed to their plays. It was really great to watch." ♦



WANT TO DONATE TO THE PROJECT?

It's as easy as 5 + 2!
Just visit www.52project.org
and click the "You Can Help" box.



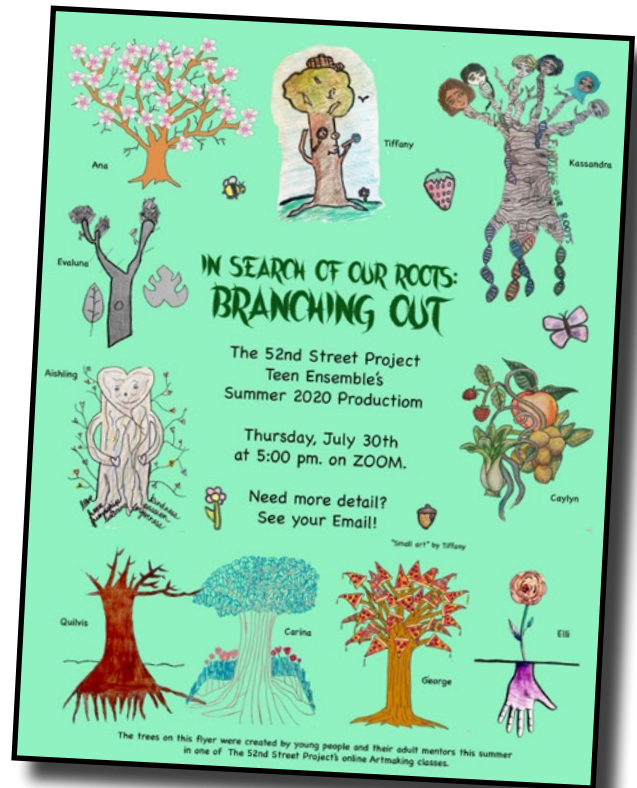


Throughout the summer, **Kat Almirañez** continued working remotely with the members of the **Teen Ensemble** and helped them to create an original play called *In Search of Our Roots*.

The piece grew from individually written monologues, which were then passed along to other teen members to expand and expound upon, resulting in individual storylines that were sewn together by the group. It was not expected that the monologues would bear fruit to a story that took place over several generations that were linked by the theme of “lessons we learn through our grandparents.”

The company presented *In Search of Our Roots: Branching Out* on Zoom at the end of July. The members involved in the show were **Darby O’Donnell, Lakshmi DeJesus, Magalis Fabian, and Nicole Quiles**.

Kat was assisted by volunteers **Ciana Proto, Ana Gonzalez Soto, and Sophia Zukoski**. ♦

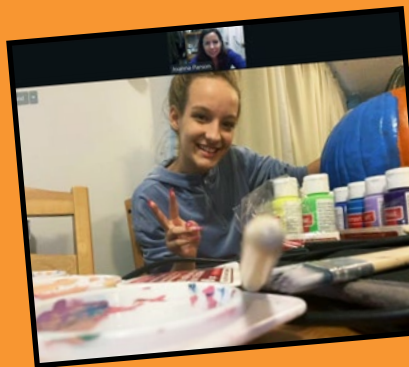


OTHER PURSUITS

We love working on plays, but it's nice to pepper our schedule with other fun virtual activities like these:



Cooking with John (see the laptop?)



Pumpkin-decoration



Dollar Bill Origami

Smart Partners **Nicole Quiles** (big pic) and **Joanna Parson** (tiny pic) have enjoyed the Project's pumpkin-decorating tradition for years and were not deterred by the lockdown. They went ahead and made a pair on Zoom! Nicole's was a classic painting of a Halloween scene and Joanna created a unique collage-o-lantern.

MEGABITS • MEGABITS • MEGA



Project pals **Freddy Arsenault** and **Gretchen Hall** had a third child recently. Here they are with **Imogen** (5), **Luna** (3) and newest addition **Ingrid** (2 months). Gretchen says "I went a little overboard in my enjoyment of babies. It is a noisy, joyful home."



Here are **Keith Wittenstein** and **Erin Mallon** with their family: **Joon** (girl, 3), **Jett** (boy, 5) and their newest, **Jiva Harrison Wittenstein** (boy), who was born on July 31st, 2020. "Jiva" means "life force" or "individual soul."



Long-time Project Vol **Lee Rosen** and his wife **Adria Vitlar** recently welcomed **Simon John Rosen-Vitlar** into their home. He was born July 20, 2020 in Sleepy Hollow.



One-time intern **Sarah Lusche** married **Noah Berman** on Aug. 25th in Greensboro, Vermont. They did it small but will do it again big next year.



So many babies! Here are our friends **Alex** and **Sam Kaczmarek** (she is a Project Big Kids Committee Member) with their extremely stylish baby **Hailey**.



In September, 2020, staffer **George Babiak** and his wife **Vanessa Valdes** decided to cycle all 360 miles of the Erie Canal from Buffalo to Albany. Pal and ProjVol **Tom Schall** joined them for the last third. Here is the mad trio at Lock 17 near Little Falls, NY. Click the image to see the video!



Bekah Brunstetter, one of our volunteer playwrights, and her husband **Morrison Keddie** are seen here in the Huntington Hospital in Pasadena, CA with **Joseph Cameron Foster-Keddie**, who was born on August 24.



Here are our erstwhile Production Manager **Syantee Sahoo** (Oh, how we miss her) and her brand-new husband **David Mkrтчian**. They got married in a beautiful Zoom ceremony at David's mom's house in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn on July 15. That little bundle of fur in David's arms? That's **Lola Dawg!**



Meanwhile, in another borough at another time and date, Project buddy **Richard Anthony** and Project Big Kids Committee Member **Avi Taussig Anthony** took their new baby **Gabrielle** (aka **Elle**) out for a walk in the neighborhood. The Project staff agrees that the three of them are very snappy dressers..

IN MEMORIAM



PHYLLIS SOMERVILLE

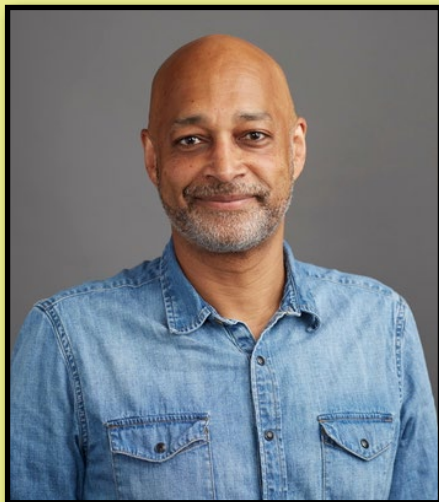
DECEMBER 12, 1943 – JULY 16, 2020

Our dear friend Phyllis left us this summer. She was one of those striking actresses that can light up a theater with only minutes of stage time. She was born in Iowa City and moved to New York with the dream of becoming a Rockette in the 1970's. She settled on St. Mark's Place and began lighting up the screen in movies like *Arthur* (1981) and countless TV shows like *The Sopranos*, *NYPD Blue*, *Kidnapped*, and very memorably as an irascible cancer patient in *The Big C*. In 2018, she played Mrs. Dubose in the acclaimed Broadway production of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Over the years, Phyllis played a host of wonderful characters on the Project stage. Our own favorite was in a Playmaking show called *A Date for Mom*, a suspenseful piece our staff member **Johanna Vidal** wrote at age 10 in which Phyllis's character unwittingly became involved with a bloodthirsty killer.

Phyllis's favorite Project role was an aspiring New York Yankee. She got to swing a foamcore bat dubbed the "Somerville Slugger." As always, she hit a home run. ♦

FLYER BAR PROFILE



FRED CARL

Occupation- “Composer, Associate Arts Professor (NYU/Tisch Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program), and Co-Associate Dean of Faculty (NYU/Tisch).”

What he does for us- “I composed for the Project twice: in 1992 and 1995. Now, I help **Avi Amon** (the Project’s Music Director) identify NYU students from the **Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program** to work with Avi and **Garrett Kim** on the fabulous **Songmaking Program**.”

Why he does what he does- “I love the daily challenges of everything I do...Oooh, can I write music for this piece that will both excite me and be interesting? Will I be able to work with this new bunch of students to watch them discover new parts of themselves? Can I help find solutions and new ways of working for faculty members? It’s all the challenge of facing the unknown and realizing that so far, I can find my solid ground.”

Hobbies- “Cooking and reading and thinking.”

Last book read- “**N.K. Jemisin’s** *The Broken Earth* trilogy.”

Most recent accomplishment- “Understanding that this Zoom virtual life that we are living now has opened up exciting opportunities that I hadn’t recognized before, even as things that we took for granted would always be there have changed.”

Best Project Memory- “So many...maybe laughing hysterically at a play from the Playmaking program or being in awe of the lyrics from one of the songs in the Songmaking program...or maybe making a delicious dinner with a house full of people on Block Island after a long day of working and rehearsing.”

Credo- “There’s always more where that came from!”

Advice to kids- “Never think that you are operating from a place of deficit...always understand that you come from abundance.”

Place of birth- “New Haven, Connecticut.”

Habitat- “Park Slope, Brooklyn.”

Favorite thing about the Project- “The commitment to service and community that everyone shares in, the kids, the adults, the family members, and all the staff...it’s a beautiful thing!”

On Flyer Bars- “I have NEVER won one in the pre-show raffle (I’m just sayin...), BUT I always buy one at Project events...this is the ONLY chocolate bar that I will actually eat!” ♦

GROWING UP FAST IN HELL’S KITCHEN

This past July, we were delighted to see an article about one of our alumni, **Kimani Ashley**, in a magazine called W42ST.nyc. Here are a few excerpts:

The 52nd Street Project saved his life. An acting program in the heart of Hell’s Kitchen, it takes young people from the age of ten through their teens, and connects them with theater professionals to make art ranging from poetry and photography, to dance, stage combat, and filmmaking.

“My brother was in it, I was in it, my niece was in it,” says Kimani. “Just right there, in the middle of ‘uptown,’ Hell’s Kitchen was a mecca of creativity. It was one of the biggest life-changing periods in my life. They took me when I was 10, a massive stutterer – I had a huge speech impediment, couldn’t speak a full sentence without stuttering – to be able to write and direct my first play.”

“From there, they take you into actually performing plays, and when I was on stage, I never stuttered. As someone who couldn’t even have a conversation, to be able to speak with such clarity – that’s something they taught me that I’ll be forever grateful.”

“It was a beautiful time.” ♦



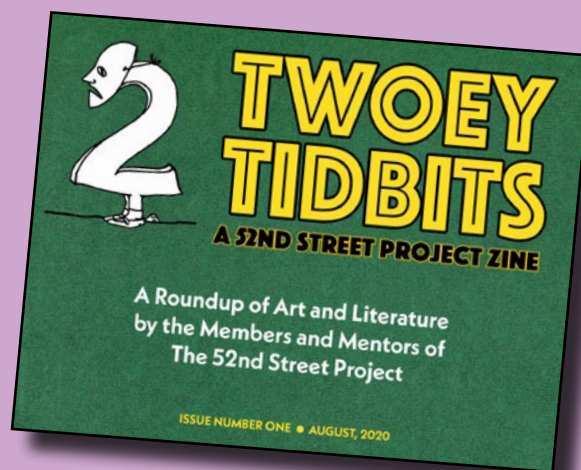
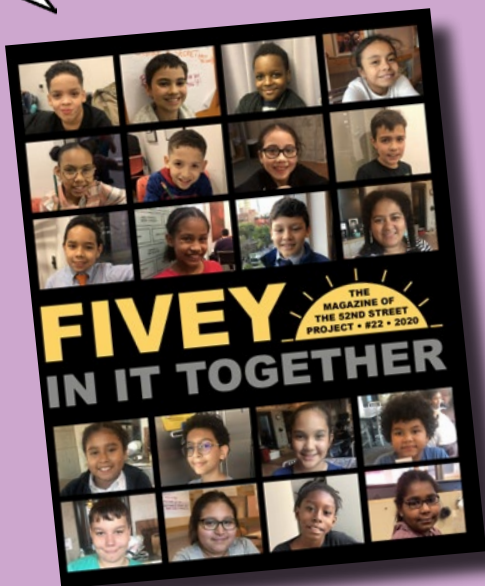
*Kimani in 2009, painting a backdrop in Marfa, Texas for a Project performance of **King Lear**, in which he was also a cast member.*

To see the full article online, click HERE. Thank you, W42ST.nyc!

TWO GREAT MAGAZINES YOU CAN DOWNLOAD FOR FREE!

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ME!



When the lockdown was imposed in New York City back in March, a lot of young people found themselves with time on their hands and little to do. Project Members, however, were not idle. Their industry and creativity over the Spring resulted in the largest issue of **Fivey**, our annual magazine, that we've ever printed: 64 pages!

The twin firehoses of art and literature did not stop over the summer, so we decided to compile another collection named after Fivey's somber sister. Issue #1 of the **Twoey Tidbits Zine**, as we call it, is even bigger: 74 pages!

Simply click on either of the two images above and you'll have instant access to these entertaining volumes. Read them cover to cover, or just give them a quick flip. Either will brighten your day. ♦

WHAT'S NEW ON THE PROJCAST?



What's that you say? You want **MORE** free entertainment from the Project? No problem! Subscribe to **The 52nd Street ProjCast!**

In the latest installment, posted in mid-October, **Karen Tineo** interviews **Ariel Estrada**, an actor and writer who talks about his experiences as a member of a martial-arts cult.

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 more-or-less monthly basis. See you on the 'Net, Yvette! ♦