



PROJECT UPDATE

FULL-COLOR ONLINE EDITION • VOL. 87 - APRIL, 2021 • GEORGE BABIAK, EDITOR

SMOKE & MIRRORS PART 1 THE TRICKY PLAYS

PLAYMAKING MAKES IT TO THE SCREEN(S)

In March of 2020, we were set to produce 10 plays that had just been written by our youngest Project members. We had to cancel the production but vowed the shows would go on... eventually. In January of 2021, we knew that we still could not open our theater, but it was high time to present the plays, so we used Zoom to mount them online. We selected a slew of classic Project projections, mailed foamcore props to our actors, and then did *Smoke and Mirrors: The Tricky Plays - Part 1* live on Thurs., Jan. 28. Here are photos and summaries of the **First Fantastic Five**.

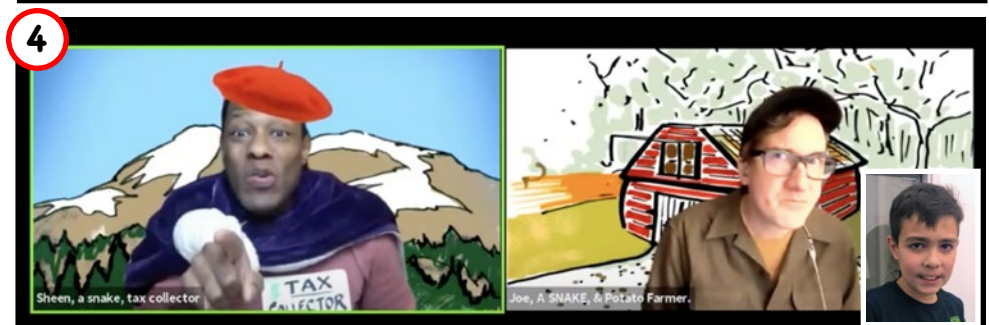
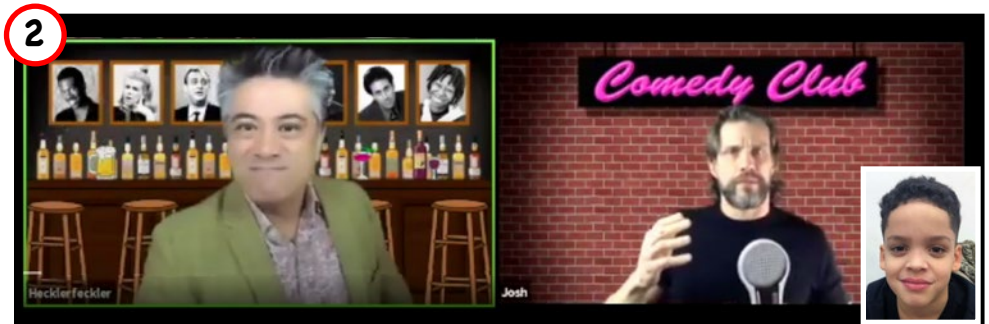
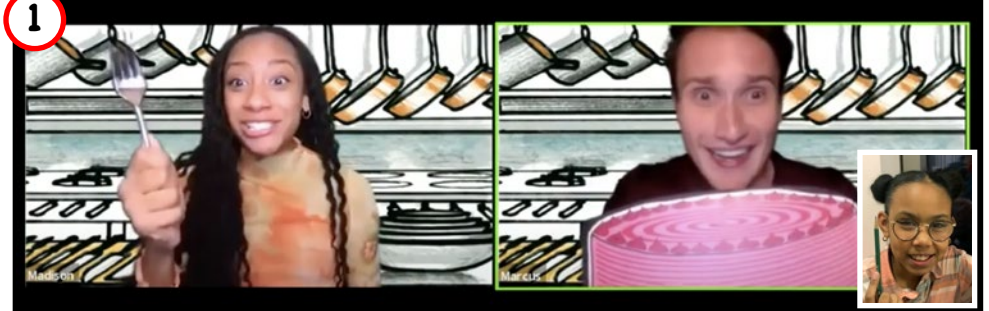
1. In **Faith Mitchell's** *The Bully Friend*, a college cooking class turned **Madeline DeFreece** and her former bully **John Manolis** into friends. **Caylyn Wan-Creager** dramaturged and **Sarah Krohn** directed.

2. A heckler (**Ariel Estrada**) and a stand-up comic (**Lee Rosen**) laughed and cried together in **Mason Berrios's** *Comedy Show*, directed by **George Babiak**.

3. **Motell Foster** was an ambitious B-ball player and **Arielle Goldman** a dancer bound for *American Idol* in **Tremaine Batson's** *The Basketball Boy and Dancing Girl*, dramaturged by **Kareem Lucas** and directed by **John Sheehy**.

4. **Korey Jackson** and **Carson Elrod** were snakes caught up in a violent power struggle in *Revolution*, written by **Gavin Kent** and co-directed by **Gus Rogerson** and **Kat Almirañez**.

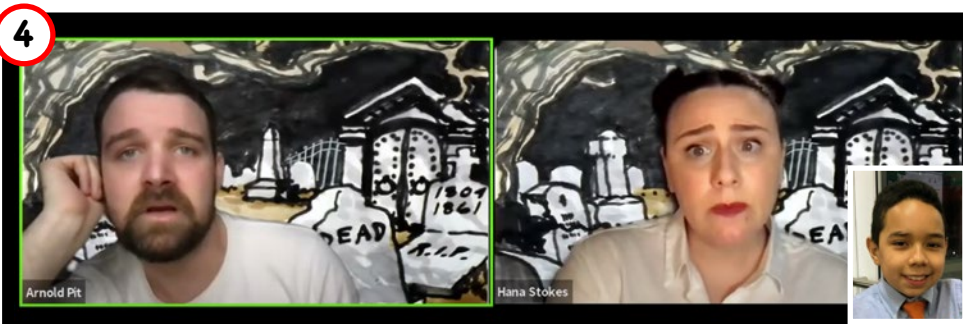
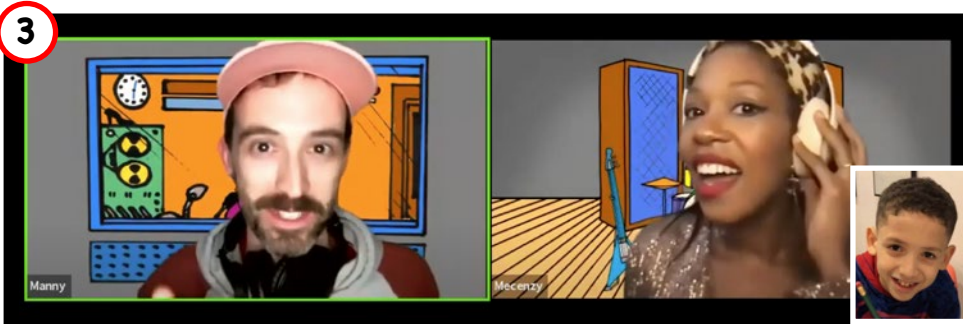
5. **Jessica Elie-Pierre's** *Mokina and Cupy* had a Wonder Woman cup (**Erin Neuffer-Salt**) and a Wonder Woman-obsessed bunny (**Jenelle Chu**) that had serious conflicts. **Grace Rex** was the director. ♦



[You can still see these plays on our YouTube Channel. Click this line to go to the playlist!](#)

SMOKE & MIRRORS PART 2

THE TRICKY PLAYS



THEN CAME ANOTHER FANTASTIC FIVE PLAYS!

Smoke & Mirrors Part I was so nicely received that it strengthened our resolve to produce *Part II* online on Thursday, March 25, 2021. For this round, we added a slideshow of the Playmaking Trip to Bridgehampton.

The musical team for both shows needs a big dollop of credit and praise. Long-time volunteer **Patrick Barnes** wrote and orchestrated all the original songs while Project music director **Avi A. Amon** created 10 studio-quality recordings of the songs that our actors could lip-sync along to. Yes, lip-sync! The Zoom platform has its merits, but rendering live music is not one of them. Thanks to Avi, however, all the songs in *Smoke and Mirrors* sounded great. (And, to be clear, the actors were lip-syncing to their own real voices.)

1. *Swap Day*, by **Kylie Rose Rivera-Beato**, told the story of two dance students (**Kendall Cafaro** and **Carolyn Holding**) in a conflict that was resolved with the aid of a shopping montage. **Ana Soto** dramaturged and played a mean girl while **Leta Renée-Alan** directed.

2. **Olive Moayed's** *How Zombies Make Us Feel?* paired an alien zombie (**Lynne Rosenberg**) with a Puerto Rican lifeguard (**Keshav Moodliar**) in an apocalyptic comedy directed by **Ashley-Marie Ortiz**.

3. **Kyle Cameron** and **Marinda Anderson** were serious musical adversaries in **Matthew Berrios's** *The Battle Begins*, dramaturged by **Julio Chavez** and directed by **Tim J. Lord**.

4. **Edgar Sinchi's** *Dream Another Dream* featured **Micah Stock** as a physics student lovestruck by **Ceci Fernandez** (who was only lovestruck by robots). **Kyle Fitzpatrick** directed this offbeat romance.

5. In *The Mystery Siblings* by **Khailey Peña**, poor college student **Adrienne C. Moore** warily befriended rich college student **Neil D'Astolfo**. **Alex O'Daly** (see her in this month's *Megabits*) was the director.

Like Part I, *Smoke & Mirrors Part II* can be seen on our YouTube Channel.

[Click this link to go to the show playlist, which includes all 5 plays and a slideshow.](#) ♦

TEENS GO LIVE! TWICE!

The 52nd Street Project's Teen Ensemble is the busiest phase in the Project's ladder of achievement. Our oldest members meet every week throughout the school year and have kept doing so on Zoom throughout this pandemic year. They are a hardy bunch.

On Thursday, February 25, five young women in the Ensemble became the first Project Members to ever perform virtually in one of our productions.

The two short plays, written by staff members, were coincidentally both about college life, so we decided to name the evening *Me & U*. Get it? U should, especially if you went to a U-niversity!

Topic: Roomies!! Fall 2k21 planning seshhh, written by **Garrett David Kim** and directed by **Ciana Proto**, starred **Darby O'Donnell**, **Lakshmi DeJesus**, & **Nicole Quiles** as freshmen wondering what their dorm assignments would be like.

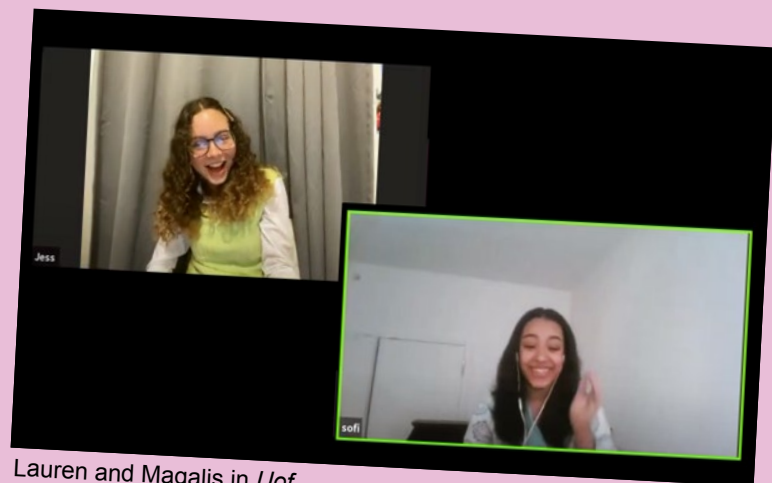
Uof written by **Caylyn Wan-Creager** and directed by **Danaya Esperanza**, featured **Lauren Amador-Cruz** as a student shocked by a sock on her doorknob. **Magalis Fabian** was the worldly Resident Advisor who helped teach Lauren's randy roommate a lesson in personal boundaries.



Click on the T-shirt to see *Me & U* on our YouTube channel. WARNING: contains mature themes and adult language!



Nicole, Lakshmi, and Darby in *Topic: Roomies...*



Lauren and Magalis in *Uof*.

Even before the *Me & U* show, back in December, our teens acted in the *Brave New Shakespeare Challenge* with the **Public Theater**. Under **Danaya Esperanza's** direction, **Lauren, Magalis, Lakshmi, and Kaylee Zambrano** did a lovers' scene from *Midsummer Night's Dream*. To see their impressive 6-minute performance, click on the "Note" box below. ♦



Click the box to see the teens' *Midsummer* love scene.



Lauren, Magalis, Lakshmi, and Kaylee do the Bard.

NO WHINES ABOUT THESE WINES

The 52nd Street Project invites you to a unique foodie fun(draising) event.
 Tuesday, March 23, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.
 on a computer screen near you.



Lew, Steve, and Willie's
Fine Wine Tasting



Lewis Black
 Comedian and emcee
 (The Daily Show)

Steve Olsen
 Proprietor and cellar
 master of the renowned
 West Bank Cafe.

Willie Reale
 Writer, ban vocalist,
 and founder of
 The 52nd Street Project.



Above right: on location at the **West Bank Cafe**. **Willie, Lew, and Steve** examine the “meniscus” of the wines as **Willie’s son Gus Reale** soberly serves as our production assistant.

The Project has some great friends, and three of them raised some funds (and glasses) for us recently.

Comedian **Lewis Black** and **Steve Olsen**, proprietor of the **West Bank Cafe**, joined Proj Founder **Willie Reale** for a virtual wine tasting recently. It was a genteel and leisurely event, but some serious logistics were involved! To make it happen, four half-bottles of fine wines and a tasty **Curran Affair Events** box of charcuterie, cheeses, nuts, and crackers were packed and sent to homes on both coasts. Miraculously, all the households received their precious fluids and treats intact and joined our hosts and wine dealer **Michael Skurnik** of Skurnik Wines & Spirits on Zoom for a safe, in-depth sampling of (deep breath) **Paolo Scavino Barolo 2016**, **La Spinetta Barbera d’Asti Ca Di Pian 2017**, **Talley Vineyards Pinot Noir 2017**, and **Domaine de l’Arlot Nuits-St-Georges Clos de l’Arlot Monopole 2018**. Whew! All were acclaimed as delicious, and the Project’s coffers were winned, er, lined, a little more. A large goblet of thanks to all our virtual attendees. ♦



Hi, P.U. Readers! I’m Ahmed, and I’m in charge of this box now! 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.

Department of Cultural Affairs	
Cultural Development Fund	\$80,650
Cantor Fitzgerald Relief Fund.....	\$45,000
The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation	\$30,000
Rose M. Badgeley Residuary Charitable Trust.....	\$25,000
Dawkins Family Foundation	\$10,000
The Jean & Louis Dreyfus Foundation	\$10,000
Pamela & Wayne Garrison Family Foundation.....	\$8,000
New York State Council on the Arts -	
Special Arts Services	\$7,500
Corcoran Group Cares	\$5,000
Community Foundation of Sarasota County	\$5,000
Howard Ashman Trust for Theater Arts	\$5,000
Maxine and Irving Castle Foundation	\$3,000
Bulls Head Foundation, Inc.	\$2,500



In March, **Tim Cass**, Senior Managing Director of **The Corcoran Group**, came to the Club-house and presented **Carol Ochs** with a check for \$5,000. That was a nice morning!

WANT TO DONATE TO THE 52ND STREET PROJECT?

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



**CAROL OCHS,
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR**



**NANCY GILES,
HOST**



**NATALIE HIRSCH,
ARTISTIC
DIRECTOR**

HIDDEN GEMS




**AVI A. AMON,
MUSICAL
DIRECTOR**



THE PERFORMERS:
ALLY BONINO
JESSICA CARVO
GREG HILDRETH
BELEN MOYANO
RONALD PEET
JON-MICHAEL REESE
EMILY SKEGGS
SKYLER VOLPE
NATALIE WALKER
and more

THE COMPOSERS:
AVI A. AMON
UTSAV BHARGAVA
KAT CARTUSCIELLO
ERIKA JI
MASON MCDOWELL
SEAN PALLATRONI
BROOKE TRUMM
JULIA VAQUERO RAMOS



THE YOUNG SONGWRITERS:
NASEEM ABDUL-MAJEED
AMARI DUBOSE
JESSICA ELIE-PIERRE
XAVIER ESPINAL
GAVIN KENT
SARAH LOPEZ
KYLIE ROSE RIVERA-BEATO
JAI-LYZZ RODRIGUEZ
AIDEN VASQUEZ

THE 52ND STREET PROJECT'S 2021 VIRTUAL GALA

A glittering array of songs written by Project kids, set to music, and then performed by the best performers we know.

May 3-May 16

Eight music videos released once every couple of days.

Monday, May 17

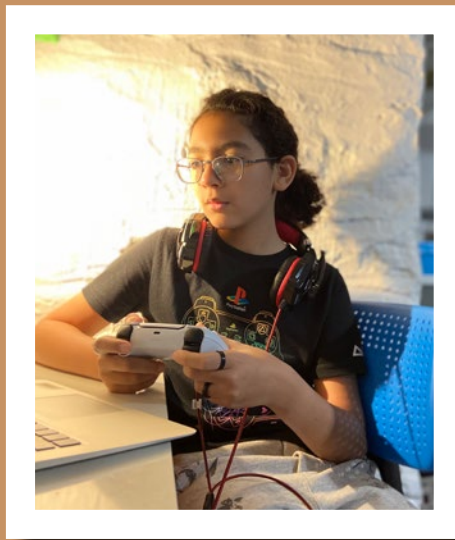
A special LIVE online performance livestreamed from the **Power Station at BerkleeNYC.**

HOW DO I ATTEND?

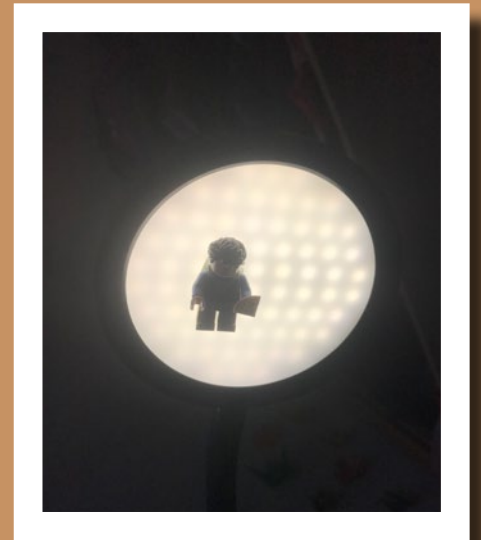
Easy! On or after May 3, just go to www.52projecthiddengemsgala.org and you'll be able to watch and stream all the recorded and live performances. All we ask is that you make a donation of any size!

52 GALLERY

In February of 2021, Project Program Director **Garrett Kim** led an online *Break It Up* photography seminar for some of our older members. Here are the students' favorite shots, which we mounted for them in custom-made **Hang-or-Stand™** frames designed by a staffer familiar with the craft of foamcore cutters. ♦



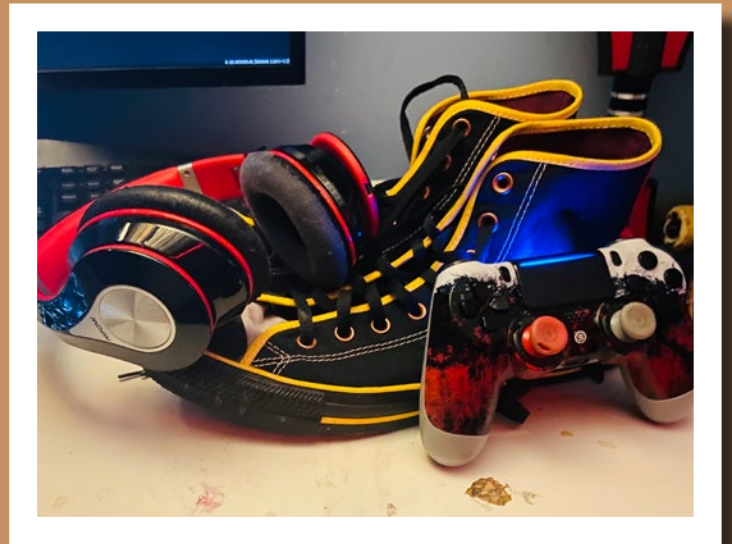
Yin-Yang
By Aiden Vasquez



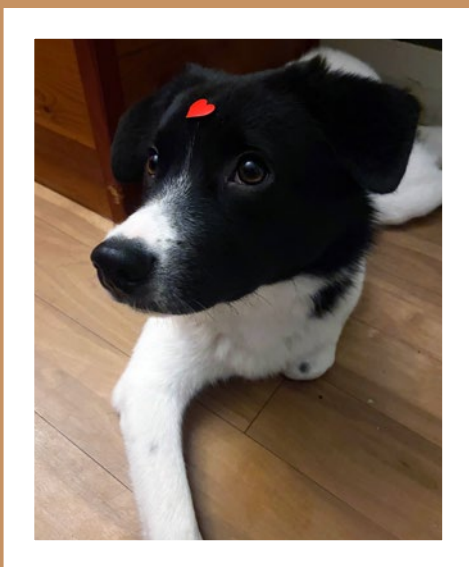
Chandler in Light
By Sarah Lopez



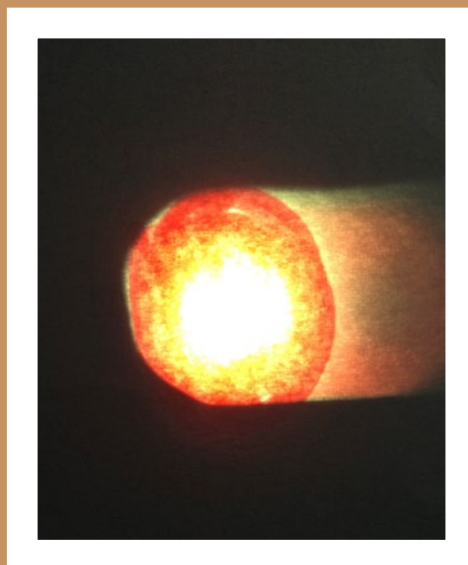
Le Mouse Perfume
By Melanie Correa



Untitled
By Alex Torres



Hudson
By Xavier Espinal



The Asteroid
By Sophia La Cotera

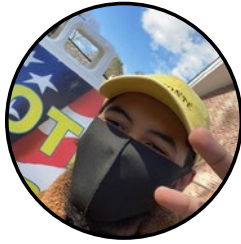


THESE VOTERS ARE DEVOTED!

Over the years, the staff and volunteers at the Project have always stressed the importance of registering to vote with our college-age members. This year, it seemed like we didn't have to do a lot of convincing. They went out, voted, and then proudly sent us selfies showing them doing their civic duty. Good going, young citizens! ♦



Chyanne Peña



Daniel Martinez



Sofia Santoni



Genesis Hires



Josh Gomez



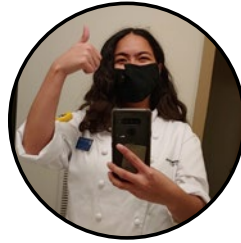
Jayda Camacho



Bryan Lopez



Wilhelmina Ohene
Kari-Kari



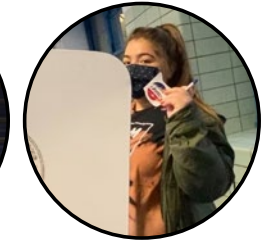
Sabrina Caldona



Karen Tineo



Justin Bannister



Jasmine Correa

A DO-IT-YOURSELF BINGO TOURNAMENT

The Project is usually an easy-going sort of organization that doesn't put a premium on competition, but once a year we hold at least one event that encourages a knock-down, drag-out, fight to the finish. For 20 years, that event has been our February **Ping-Pong Tournament**. Like so much else in the COVID era, we had to set it by the wayside, at least until summer. Instead, **Garrett Kim** found a 20th century-era number generator online and led a virtual Bingo tournament!

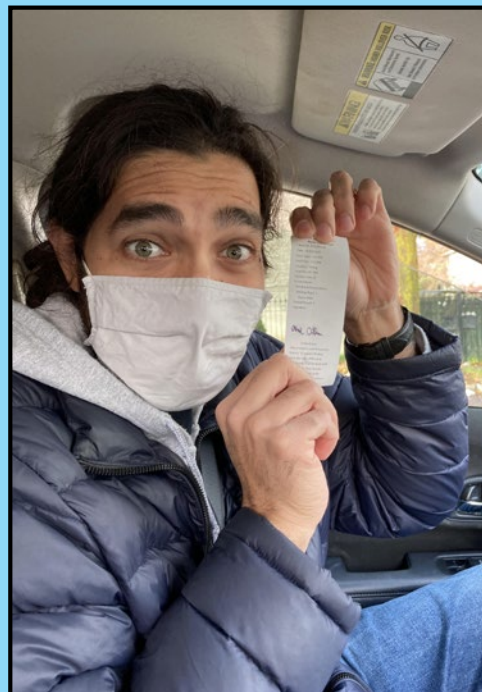
The event began with all contestants making their own Bingo cards (see some samples below). Some players enjoyed that part the most.

The big winners in Round One were **Ahmed Shabana** and **Ruffin Prentiss III**, who played as the **Indestructible Rhinos**. Round Two went to **The Wobbly Wobbeongs**, better known as **Hannah Leon** and **Helen Cespedes**.

We are especially proud of volunteer **Ronald Peet** (left), who trekked over to the clubhouse and picked up his foamcore 3rd Place trophy on behalf of **The Chunky Monkeys** (who were Ronald and his Smart Partner **Xavier Espinal**). ♦



MEGABITS • MEGABITS • MEGABITS



Rachel James and Alexandra O'Daly have a baby! Frances Rose James O'Daly (affectionately known as Frankie) was born at **New York University Medical Center** on Thursday, August 6th of 2020. It happened at 10:18 a.m. and she was a healthy 9lbs, 7oz. and a full 21 inches tall. She is also so darned cute we had to include a close-up.

We are very proud of staffer **Ahmed Attia**, who passed his road test in October and is now the bearer of a **New York State Driver's License**.



Bingo Ace **Ruffin Prentiss III** (see page 7) and **Carra Patterson** are a true Project couple who have graced our stage on many occasions. On December 25, 2020, they gave birth to **Cressida Makari Prentiss** in Vancouver, BC. Ruffin says she was a great Christmas gift



Jayleen Velez (above) is the latest Project member to be accepted to the **University of Michigan**. She is getting a full ride thanks to the **Henry and Gloria Jacobs Scholarship**, which gives preference to qualified alumni of **The Project!** She'll join fellow Projectile **Karen Tineo** (below) at the U of M this fall.



WELCOME TO OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

Long-time volunteers **Korey Jackson** and **Margaret Odette** step up to join the Project's Board of Directors.



Korey is an actor, director, writer and producer who has been seen on stage and screen in various projects, most recently in the premiere of *The Hot Wing King* at Signature Theatre and in *Godfather of Harlem* (Epix). He's been a volunteer at the Project since 2011, and has participated in **One-on-One's**, **Playmaking**, **Playback**, **Songmaking**, and perhaps most significantly a six-year long **Smart Partnership** with Project member **Chayse Peña**. Korey was seen in our live stream production of *Smoke and Mirrors*, *The Tricky Plays - Pt. I*. ♦



Margaret is a first-generation Haitian-American actor from Harlem, NYC. She has appeared at **Rattlestick Theater**, **The Long Wharf Theater**, **Williamstown**, **The Geffen Playhouse**, & **Chautauqua**. She was "Hero" in the **Public Theater's** production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, which aired on PBS's **Great Performances**. She will soon be seen in a major role in **Netflix's** *Sex/Life*. At the Project, Margaret has been in **Playmaking**, **One-on-One's**, **Dancemaking**, and one of our first-ever **Virtual Playmaking** productions. ♦

IN MEMORIAM

This has been a very difficult year, and many have had it far more difficult than others. The Project Community lost no less than three mothers in the last six months, and our condolences go out to their children and families. We bid a sad farewell to...

YVETTE FERNANDEZ

Mother to Azalea and Kai

PAULETTE KNELL

Mother to Matthew and Marcelle

PATRICIA O'DONNELL

Mother to Brandon, Darby, and Aengus

SABRINA MAKES SOME MADELEINES



We were at the Clubhouse at the very end of March when we received a phone call from **Sabrina Caldona**, a graduate of ours. “Can I come in and do some baking in the Clubhouse kitchen?,” she asked. We said “By all means!” To our delight, she came in and made several batches of that Proustian delight, the Madeleine.

Not that many years ago, when she regularly went on Project trips as a kid, Sabrina was awed by staff member **John Sheehy’s** skills in cooking for large numbers of people. As she grew older, she decided to go into the culinary arts and is now a chef at the **Otway** restaurant in Brooklyn, where she is renowned for her doughnuts.

Why was she suddenly inspired to come in and make some delicate French cakes at the Project? “I just wanted to get out of the house.” She also wanted to experiment with different techniques, making one batch with olive oil and another with butter. Sabrina generously shared her Madeleines with us and as we brought them to our lips, remembrances of things past danced in our heads. ♦

FLYER BAR PROFILE

MICHAEL PROPSTER



Michael with a foamcore bust of Galileo, a prop from his first play with us.

Advice to kids- "People love to tell you what you can't do or what you can't be. But none of them know who you really are and what you're capable of. Do and be what you want to be and do."

Place of birth- "Columbus, Ohio."

Habitat- "Astoria, Queens"

Favorite thing about the Project- "Getting to know the kids during each show and watching them grow as people (sometimes overnight). The Project is one of the most special places in NY. And I feel luckily to have felt like I've belonged since the minute I started volunteering 10 years ago. So thank you."

On Flyer Bars- "They are simply the MOST DELICIOUS candy bar in the WORLD! Can't wait to have one again... but not in the theater. We want to keep it clean!" ♦

What he does for us- Michael first volunteered as an actor in 2011 in our **Replay Readings**. He has racked up an impressive list of Proj credits in the last decade by having been a performer, writer, and/or director in **two Playbacks, six One-on-Ones, four Playmakings, and two Stage Combats**. He has also been a volunteer on the **Big Kids** fundraising committee and, most impressively, was a **Smart Partner** to not one, but two different boys... each for YEARS.

Occupation- "Actor. Sometimes a director, sometimes a writer, but mostly an actor."

Why he does what he does- "The people. Theatre-makers are the most exciting and fun people you'll ever come across. I love being around them and watching their creativity at work."

Hobbies- "Crosswords with coffee, being an obsessive sports fan, video games, and recently, cooking."

Last book read- "Sadly, I'm not been much of a book-reader lately. Mostly news articles and interviews. But my favorite book is *East of Eden* by **John Steinbeck**."

Most recent accomplishment- "Writing the script for an interactive performance of the game *Mafia*. It's set in the Australian Outback!"

Best Project Memory- "Too many to pin down one. Asking George to make me a giant foam-care garbage truck and him saying yes! Breaking character and laughing uncontrollably at **Bill Camp**. Watching shows from the wings. Block Island. Performing with each of my Smart Partners on the mainstage."

Credo- "Sometimes it's necessary to go a long distance out of the way in order to come back a short distance correctly.' It's a quote from *Zoo Story* by **Edward Albee**."

WHAT'S NEW ON THE PROJCAST?



Click on the logo for a Projcast short-cut!

In the three latest installments, posted in early 2021, you get to hear the inside story behind our shows from the Playmaking writers (see pages 1 and 2) and the teens who performed *Me & U* (see page 3).

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 at left, hit "SUBSCRIBE" and start enjoying stories, plays, interviews and more on a more-or-less monthly basis. See you on the Web, Jeb! ♦

Hey, golfers! Save the date!

GOLF!

GOLF!

FOOD!

DRINK!

GOLF!

GOLF!



Thursday, May 20 at the
**Quaker Ridge
Golf Club**
Scarsdale, NY



Benefiting the
**The 52nd
Street Project**

Serving the children of
Hell's Kitchen since 1981

For information, contact Kristina at nungaray@52project.org