

5 FOR FIGHTING

BY DAVID JOHNSON, ELLEN LAMPERT-GRÉAUX, MARK A. NEWMAN & HANNAH KATE KINNERSLEY

This is our sixth year of showcasing up-and-coming young talent as part of our Young Designers To Watch, and it has grown to become quite a popular annual event. This year's group is as diverse as ever, with representatives from the West Coast, the East Coast, even the Far East. Just don't tell us these five designers aren't gonna make it big. Them's fightin' words.

ZAK BOROYAY, PROJECTION DESIGNER



Zak Borovay, a longtime assistant projection designer for such veterans as Batwin + Robin and Wendall Harrington who's now gaining recognition for his own work, is in many ways the poster child for convergence. Exposed to theatre from a very early age (his father Len is a set designer and high school teacher on Long Island, and Broadway designer David Gallo babysat him in his youth), Borovay spent much of his youth working with his father in “practically every regional theatre on Long Island” doing everything from carpentry to sketching and designing to getting lunch. At the same time, however, his interests also included music, art, computers, and video. He studied jazz performance at Berklee

College of Music. “We had this family dream: everyone in the family all working in the theater,” Borovay says. “I was going to be in the pit orchestra, my sister was going to be the director, and my father would be the set designer.”

After graduation in the ‘90s, Borovay parlayed his knowledge of art and computers into a job as a graphic designer in New York. During that period, he became interested in web video and the idea of using the Internet to show film and video. In 1999, Borovay worked with Apple and Sorenson Media to engineer the first live streaming QuickTime webcast. “That's where I first got interested in taking the world of film and video and making it happen inside the computer instead of by a more traditional means,” he says. “And it was when I first started trying to find a way to tie my interests in theatre, music, computers, and video all together, and integrate them into live performance in some way.”

According to the designer, those goals didn't totally crystallize until he saw the Broadway production of *The Rocky Horror Show* in 2000, with projections by Batwin + Robin and realized “there was a place I could work doing what I wanted to do, and that they tied all those elements together.”

So his next step, logically enough, was to Batwin + Robin. He asked Gallo to set up an introduction, and after meeting with Linda Batwin he was asked to join the firm, initially as their computer guru. “I was brought on board as the resident Mac expert, but took care of that pretty quickly, and after they realized I had this strong theatrical interest they put me on a bunch of projects, and it was a great learning experience for me.” While there, Borovay worked on such theatrical events as the live production *Sinatra: His Voice, His World, His Way* at Radio City Music Hall, the off-Broadway musical *Radiant Baby*, and the Broadway play *Golda's Balcony*, as well as a variety of museum, cruise ship, and corporate projects. “I was able to get my hands on anything you could imagine, anything that incorporated multimedia, and it was great because it meant you never did the same thing twice; every project was a little different and you got a chance to learn about every part of the production.”

Still, that theatre itch still needed scratching, so after three years Borovay left the firm to venture out on his own, collaborating with Gallo on *Dance of the Vampires* and *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and eventually working with none other than Wendall Harrington on tours for Simon and Garfunkel and John Fogerty and such theatre projects as Eve Ensler's *The Good Body* and the upcoming Broadway musical *In My Life*. “She's been a wonderful mentor on many levels, not just in terms of the art we create. She's helped me learn about contracts, negotiating techniques, and how to find and sustain work.”

“The thing I appreciate most about Zak is that he understands what it means to work in the theatre,” says Harrington. “He understands the work part, he's not dazzled or distracted. He intuits his function, focuses, and then makes the impossible possible. It's all well and good to have ‘the vision thing’ — which he has in spades-but he also has the solidity and craft that serves to advance a project even when it gets frantic and emotional. I don't know a better thing to say but this: I trust him.”

Directors have begun trusting him too. Borovay's recent credits have ranged from the NY Stage and Film production of *Behind the Limelight*, the premiere of the play version of *Dead Man Walking* at Fordham University, and the touring production of Pilobolus Dance Theatre's *BUGonia*. Currently, he's working with fellow projection designer Sage Carter on a multimedia exhibit for the Public Theatre's 50th anniversary.

Borovay sees himself as part of the second generation of projection designers in that he's never worked with slides, film, or Pani. “Everything I've done has been in the digital realm,” he explains. “So I've worked really hard to understand older types of media because I think it informs everything in the digital world anyway — it's important to know about photography, film, and how those things work. People who come from the digital world sometimes tend to think that you can do anything and everything all at once, when a photograph of a flower is all you need. My ultimate goal is to support the story in an organic, soulful way.” — David Johnson