Sometimes, as director Terrence Spivey puts it, actors have the power to change your mind. That's what happened on a stuffy Tuesday night in North Collinwood earlier this month during the first round of auditions for “Objectively/Reasonable,” a new documentary play that seeks to mine community reactions to the killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice by Cleveland police. Commissioned by Playwrights Local 4181, the only theater in the Cleveland area devoted entirely to locally written works, the production will premiere in August at Creative Space at Waterloo Arts, a black box on East 156th Street, a few blocks from the Slovenian Workmen’s Home, where the tryouts were held. Although Spivey and David Todd, artistic director of the playwright-driven company, weren’t looking for child actors as they assembled their cast — at least not middle-schoolers and even younger — they showed up anyway, armed with short monologues they’d learned by heart, some they’d even written themselves.

**Theater**

**Voices of the invisible**

Young students bring their own words to Tamir Rice tragedy

Andrea Simakis | asimakis@plaind.com

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**Cleveland Arts Prize**

For award winner, electronic music is a calling

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John Elliott, Cleveland Arts Prize Emerging Artist winner, probably owes a debt of gratitude to Wendy Carlos.

In 1968, the musician (who was then known as Walter Carlos) shook the recording industry with the album “Switched On Bach,” which won three Grammy Awards and would go on to sell a million albums in six years. It was the first all-electronic music album, and it helped popularize the Moog synthesizer.

Elliott, 32, of Lakewood, is an electronic music artist who has played festivals all over the world with his Buchla synthesizer. He will receive his Arts Prize along with seven others who will be honored at the 56th annual awards ceremony on Thursday at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Elliott grew up in Bay Village and had an intense interest in music from a very early age.
Most were from Cleveland's School of the Arts and about the project from their drama teacher, India Nicole Burton. Burton, in turn, heard about the project from Executive Director of Karamea Theatre, who had her in numerous productions. And she's working on another project with Michael Oum, one of the playwrights, creating a series of monologues, distilled conversations with people in and around Cleveland, that will make "Objectively Reasonable." Burton's project in progress, its title is taken from a line in a poem by poet and Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Tom J. Mihalek. November 2015. The report was the third expert opinion justifying the actions of Officer Tim Loehmann, who opened fire on the boy battling what proved to be a toy gun at the Cudell Recreation Center, seconds after arriving on the scene five days after the shooting, on Nov. 22, 2014.

Robert F. Kennedy's assassination was a truism of life, but it was compounded by shooting the officer's conduct as any other or less reasonable would also be a tragedy, not just another reporting of the consequences of the loss of a life, or the age of man (or woman)." W. Ken Kanatara, a Florida police consultant, wrote in the report.

And the day a young boy willfully shot himself, public opinion blunted the conclusions, writing that "Racism is simply the fact that there was no immediately obvious reason to suspect the officer of misconduct to the Cleveland Division of Police."

The plan, said artistic director Todd, who consulted on the project and is pulling all the monologues together, was an intended community response to that assessment and the shooting itself.

"Hey, you see. You're not invisible!"

The young artists demonstrated their improvisational skills as part of their project before Sydney Turner at the Cleveland School of the Arts' Home in Collinwood. The young actor's spontaneous and unscripted and gently unscripted the nation.

"I kinda understand why they thought it was a real gun, but I would have at least asked him to put it down... I'm pretty sure he would have put it down, but he had a mentality like me."

At age 12, she stands about as tall and, just looking at her from a distance, she'd be just another girl, as much older, as voracious, as a killer, asked to the officer responding to the 911 call. But it was a weapon at the West Side Police Station. She turned around and you see her sweat, girl.

"I see what's going on, and it reminds me of the open-call auditions from last summer; the ones who did it in the August Wilson's "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" at Karamu."

When he heard about Tamir, he thought about that role. "That was very quick." Todd agreed. "We should have somebody of that age."

"It was 12 years old when he died." Todd continued. "We should be looking at the black community and saying, ‘Hey, I see you. You're not invisible."'

"The more work like this I see, the more work like this I see," Turner said. "I see what's going on, and it reminds me of the role they played in the "Joe Turner's Come and Gone.”" At Karamu in 2015. As he stood and gazed at it, he was all the more devastated for his soft-spoken delivery. "I wasn't really that surprised that an African-American man had been killed by police," he said. "I think of Michael Brown in Ferguson, and Eric Garner in New York City, black men who did it at the hands of police in the summer of 2014."

"Just relax," she added gently.

The response was spontaneous, unsung and uncontested, and all quality Todd encouraged and the other playwrights grappling with the Tamir Rice shooting chose to preserve in their finished monologues.

Joining Oum, executive director of the Cleveland Arts Prize, are playwrights Mike Geffrard, Tom Hayes, Linda Langford, Mary K. Wenzel (also an Arts Prize winner) and Todd.

"They're probably more interested in getting a job, and they're not trying to mess with you. They won't call you dusty because your hair color, and they won't call your mom can't afford to keep her hair done like everyone else in their neighborhood.

"I see what's going on, and it reminds me of the '60s when [playwrights] were responding to what was happening. And that's happening now.

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"Art, he said, is going to be the savior of society."