

—Slug:..... COMM-0836.arts.Redfern_Arts
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—For section..... The Arts
—Format..... News - byline and dateline
—Dateline.....
—Article Number:..... 42417

Notes from editor (not for publication):

You have been super busy this week! Thanks, Annie.

I pulled up a paragraph that I thought we needed sooner to contextualize the story.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 New leader eyes ways to 'bring the community back to
2 the Redfern'

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3 Keene State College plans revival of its Presenting Series
4 and a renewed commitment to the performing arts

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5 TEXT BODY:

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6 Until about a decade ago, area audiences could see the
7 likes of the Paul Taylor Dance Company, Pilobolus, and
8 Preservation Hall Jazz Band at remarkably affordable prices in
9 nearby Keene as part of the Redfern Presenting Series at Keene
10 State College (KSC).

11 Now, the college intends to revive the series and to bring
12 in other companies and artists — national and international as
13 well as regional — not only as an enhancement to KSC’s
14 performing arts students’ learning, but also “to bring the
15 community back to the Redfern and really get the arts out there
16 to the community,” says Stephanie Bass Abrams, the newly
17 appointed performing arts program manager and artistic director.

18 The new role replaces the past executive director
19 position that was last filled in 2020, she tells *The Commons*. “It
20 really is like putting all my skill sets to work.”

21 Abrams ran a school for circus and physical theater —
22 [Kinetic Theory Theatre](#) — for almost 15 years in Los Angeles, “so
23 a lot of what I’m doing here at the Redfern is very much what I
24 did all those years running my own school,” she says.

25 “The difference here is that this is a presenting house,”
26 Abrams explains, noting the uses of the Center’s three spaces: the
27 main theater, a 572-seat proscenium stage house with wing space
28 enough to accommodate large touring shows; Alumni Recital
29 Hall, primarily a KSC music department concert venue seating
30 350, and Wright Theater, a black box (flexible space) theater that
31 accommodates roughly 100 people.

32 All are “beautiful, comfortable spaces,” she says.

33 “The primary function of the Redfern,” said Abrams, “is
34 to serve our academic departments of music and theater and
35 dance,” each of which mounts its own full season of productions
36 — four or five from the theater and dance department, including
37 a fall musical — and frequent smaller concerts with different
38 ensembles, guests, and students from the music department.

39 Abrams’ role is to support all productions, not to create
40 them. “So that’s a shift for me,” she says.

41 But managing staff, planning season promotion, and
42 tending to logistics and to the day-to-day “crossing of Ts and
43 dotting of Is” all combine into a role that “just feels second nature
44 to me,” she says.

45 Abrams is quick to add that there are, of course, ample
46 performing arts offerings in Keene and surrounding areas, “but
47 I’ve heard from a lot of people that the Redfern used to be this
48 sort of hub, a place that people knew to come to for these really
49 amazing cultural offerings that they weren’t going to get at other
50 places in the region. And that, unfortunately, hasn’t been
51 happening for quite some time.”

52 So the intention, she hopes, is to bring that back with the
53 Presenting Series starting next fall.

54 Abrams will be handling much of the curating and
55 booking for the revived series, in collaboration with department
56 chairs.

57 “I’ve asked our department chairs for music and theater
58 and dance to send me a wish list — ‘give me your top companies
59 that you would love to see at the Redfern’ — because they know
60 best what the students really need that goes hand in hand with
61 their curriculum [and] what’s going to enhance their learning
62 experience,” she says.

63 **Building interest in the arts**

64 One of Abrams’ goals is to engage the entire KSC
65 campus community, all of whom are offered free admission to
66 Redfern events. While performing arts students earn class credit
67 for attending, Abrams hopes that other students “will be
68 interested in what we’re doing.”

69 “I think we’re doing a pretty good job of engaging
70 students within our performing arts departments [and] that could
71 always be improved on,” she says, acknowledging that “we
72 haven’t seen a lot of involvement with students across the
73 campus yet.”

74 To that end, she’s working with other student services
75 and recently “we did some tabling to let the students know that
76 all Keene State students get free tickets to all of our events.”

77 Working on audience development, Abrams seeks
78 connections and crossover, too, reaching out to other academic

79 departments. If, for instance, a show has a social justice focus,
80 that could appeal to political science students and others
81 interested in the social justice movement. A culture-specific
82 production could draw a correlated department's students, too.

83 Moreover, Abrams intends to reach out to communities
84 beyond the campus — “to families and people of all different
85 ages” — to expose them to arts they otherwise might not get to
86 see.

87 “And we’d love to be able to bring in school kids from
88 the region for free matinees and things like that, so that we can
89 ensure that the kids in this community are really getting that
90 access,” she says.

91 “We have community partnerships, too,” Abrams adds.
92 Rather than make the sites available for “just typical rentals,” she
93 says the college specifically wants area nonprofit organizations
94 “to be able to bring their shows to their community and to ours.”

95 Redfern staff includes box office, front of house, and
96 technical theater teams, all of which include “a lot of student
97 workers.”

98 “So that’s another way the students can get involved,”
99 Abrams says. “They work on the shows, so they get that hands-on
100 experience.”

101 **Funding still a challenge**

102 One of the challenges Redfern faces in resurrecting the
103 Presenting Series is funding, because funding for all the arts is
104 endangered these days, “but we have access to grants and we’re
105 going to do our best to try to get those,” Abrams says.

106 “There have been some amazingly generous donors that
107 have given to Keene State. And we hope that people will consider
108 [...] that their contributions will go far here, because the college
109 really does support what we do, too,” she adds.

110 “And we keep ticket prices ridiculously low” with a
111 current top price of \$15, Abrams says — part of the theater’s
112 mission “to keep the arts accessible to everyone.”

113 “We may have to raise prices a little in the future, but it’s
114 still going to be extremely affordable,” she continues.

115 Abrams hopes that Brattleboro area arts lovers consider
116 the college’s offerings as she and the college rebuild and
117 revitalize the program.

118 “We’re only 20 minutes from [Interstate 91] Exit 3 in
119 Brattleboro. I think people sometimes forget how close Keene is,”
120 she says.

121 More information about the Redfern Presenting Series —
122 and related post-show receptions and experiences — will be
123 forthcoming in the spring.

124 In the meantime, Redfern’s fall’s lineup is seen on
125 keene.edu/arts/redfern and includes a Dances on Film project
126 and a musical adaptation of *The Bridges of Madison County*.

127 **String quartet to perform**

128 The first major event of the school year is a concert on
129 Friday, Oct. 17, at 7 p.m. in the Alumni Recital Hall by the Apple
130 Hill String Quartet.

131 Winner of the CMAcclaim award from Chamber Music
132 America, the Apple Hill String Quartet provides music direction
133 for Apple Hill Center for Chamber Music’s Summer Chamber
134 Music Workshop in Nelson, New Hampshire.

135 The quartet is, according to the Redfern website, “known
136 for cultivating connection among people of diverse backgrounds,
137 cultures, and ages through its guiding philosophy, Playing for
138 Peace” and through concerts and residencies locally, nationally,
139 and internationally.

140 Friday’s program includes works by Haydn, Kelley and
141 Miéville, Brouwer, D’Rivera, and Haas.

142 Tickets are \$15 (\$10 for seniors and youth) and free for
143 KSC students, faculty, and staff.

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