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—Contributor.....Annie Landenberger
—Contributor email.....verbatimvt@gmail.com
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HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 'A winter tale for winter people'

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#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

2 Vermont Suitcase Company returns to Next Stage with

3 'The Continuing Adventures of King Wenceslas and His Page

4 Edith'

#####END SUBHED#####

5 TEXT BODY:

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6 KING: *That much meat in a man's stomach weighs heavy
on his sleep. I dread the dreams I'll have tonight.*

8 PAGE: *Perhaps you can avoid them? Eat a few more
vegetables instead?*

10 KING: *Foolish Edith. Though your name suggests a deeper
11 knowledge on the subject, you know nothing of what it is to eat!*
12 *Roast duck, glistening hams, tender porklets—*

13 PAGE: *Salmon that slides off the spoon!*

14 KING: *Edith. Salmon with a spoon?*

15 * * *

16 Vermont Suitcase Company (VSC) is back with yet
17 another zany, fast-paced “winter tale for winter people,” as the
18 theater troupe calls it. This time, following the first two years’
19 shows centered on the same main characters and setting, *The
20 Continuing Adventures of King Wenceslas and his Page Edith* is
21 touring the area through Sunday, Dec. 28.

22 The 45-minute romp features the same basic outline of
23 VSC’s previous two King Wenceslas shows but with new scenes
24 at the core featuring the King and his Page, Edith, traversing “the
25 deep and crisp and even snow of Medieval Europe in their
26 comedic search for meaning and goodness,” as described in a
27 VSC press release — a play that “delves deep between the
28 stanzas” of a favorite carol of the season.

29 The performers promise “quick-paced physical comedy,
30 stage magic, and puppets, all performed by four actors.”

31 Matt Tibbs, who has been playing the King since the first
32 Wenceslas show, is back; Saskia Bailey-de Brujin plays Edith, and
33 VSC co-founders Dory Hamm and Shannon Ward play all the
34 other characters, including several puppets.

35 “They’ve become such amazing puppeteers,” says Sandy
36 Klein, the company’s cofounder, producer, and designer. In a
37 lineup of six characters all conversing, Hamm and Ward work
38 two puppets each from the middle of each set.

39 As she did for VSC’s first two winter touring shows, New
40 England Youth Theatre (NEYT) alumna Rosa Palmeri has written
41 and directs the 2025 show.

42 “Without giving too much away, there’s a young love
43 affair gone wrong, a couple of desperate Christmas cookies, and
44 a giant, stubborn bird — all played by puppets and very skilled

45 actors!" says Palmeri, an actor and multihyphenate theater person
46 in New York City.

47 Surrounding the new scenes is "original framework of the
48 play."

49 "A hapless King and his loyal Page, bullied by his power-
50 hungry mother and brother, venture forth to bring food, wine,
51 and pine logs to a peasant," she says. "It's the classic carol come
52 to life, in the silliest way possible."

53 "And there's a new T-shirt every year, too," says Klein,
54 "which is cool."

55 *The Commons* spoke with Klein, who happens to be
56 Palmeri's mother, in her shop at NEYT, where she has been
57 designing costumes and filling other roles for years.

58 The VSC is not officially affiliated with NEYT, "but we're
59 a group of people who came up through [NEYT founders Peter
60 Gould's and Stephen Stearns'] training and Gould's Get Thee to
61 the Funnery program designed to introduce young people to
62 Shakespeare," Klein says.

63 Several involved in those programs as youth had grown
64 into theater work elsewhere: A handful worked on St. John in the
65 U.S. Virgin Islands, staging *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with
66 school-aged children.

67 "We didn't have enough kids to play the lovers," Klein
68 recalls, "so we ended up using sock puppets. And we loved it so
69 much that that evening we said, 'You know, we'd always said,
70 "Let's start a small company, a comedy touring company.''''

71 That was the catalyst.

72 It was 2018 when VSC thus launched as a summer
73 theater troupe. Four years later, VSC created a film of its
74 *Emperor's New Clothes* script on a shoestring budget in a small
75 in-town apartment. That won a few awards, including two at the
76 Vermont Film Festival.

77 "We became Vermont Suitcase Films and Vermont
78 Suitcase Company," Klein explains. "One is a touring company,

79 and the other a film company. They'll eventually be under the
80 same nonprofit umbrella."

81 Since then, even in modified fashion during the
82 pandemic, the VSC has been touring Vermont every summer with
83 a show similar in style to the Wenceslas plays — broadly
84 delivered and bold with ample physical comedy, satire, spoof,
85 and nutty characters — much in the vein of 17th-century Italian
86 commedia dell'arte.

87 Starting with the first winter show in 2023, the
88 Wenceslas tour, the VSC has been honing a niche in the regional
89 line up of lively arts for the holidays.

90 This year, as with last, the VSC brings Heedless of the
91 Gale, a seasonal vocal ensemble with Arthur Davis and other
92 area musicians, to "sing before our two of our shows," says Ward,
93 adding that "we sing carols throughout."

94 "Which is very funny in comparison with Heedless of the
95 Gale," she says. "They come out and sing this beautiful song, and
96 then we come out" singing pretty goofy.

97 Is Wenceslas Christmasy? The spirit of it is, inevitably,
98 "but there's really nothing religious about it," Ward says.

99 There are, though, Hamm, adds, "some references to
100 Christmasy things that are not, you know, particularly
101 commercial. Most of our jokes are written for the adults: We're
102 sending them over the heads of the kids. And then we have
103 puppets and all sorts of silliness for the kids."

104 "We're finally starting to fill houses," Hamm says, "which
105 is exciting. It's taken a few years to be known, but now we're at
106 the point now where I'll see someone on the street, and they'll
107 say, 'Oh — you live in a Vermont suitcase.'"

108 "We're starting to have a fan base," he continues. "The
109 hope was to make it a holiday tradition" as audiences become
110 "excited to see what changes" there are one year to the next.

111 "It's also very comedic, just to have the scenario be kind
112 of standard, but mix it up, and standard, mix it up, shake it up,
113 put it upside down," Hamm adds.

114 With a nod to holiday traditions like *A Christmas Carol*,
115 *The Nutcracker*, and Handel's *Messiah* — “It's the time of year
116 when people want to see [and hear] the same thing — something
117 familiar,” says Hamm, “but ours is not every year.”

118 He says the VSC is looking forward to “when we hit sort
119 of a four- or five-year loop.”

120 “Then we'll start to recycle some of the scenes, and it'll
121 be the kind of thing that you will remember: ‘Oh, my gosh — I
122 remember the rabbit from year two!’” he says.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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123 The Vermont Suitcase Company's *The Continuing*
124 *Adventures of King Wenceslas and His Page Edith* will be
125 presented Friday, Dec. 19, at 7 p.m. at Next Stage Arts, 15
126 Kimball Hill, Putney. Tickets are \$12 (\$5 for those 18 and under),
127 and are available at nextstagearts.org. Doors open at 6:15 p.m.

128 The VSC tour continues through Dec. 28 with
129 performances in Wardsboro, Saxtons River, and Brattleboro.
130 Admission to the other shows this season is by donation, which
131 will go toward paying the company — a priority. For locations
132 and times for the other performances, visit
133 vermontsuitcasecompany.com.

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