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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Family puppet shows promise ‘laughter, joy, and a sense  
2 of belonging’

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3 Sandglass Theater’s Winter Sunshine Series launches this  
4 Saturday

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5 TEXT BODY:

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6 Live and lovely events — like Putney’s Sandglass  
7 Theater’s 19th Winter Sunshine Series, which launches this  
8 Saturday — may be more essential now than ever before.

9 As described in a press release, this annual tradition, “a  
10 warm beacon during Vermont’s coldest months,” is “rooted in joy,  
11 creativity, and community” and brings folks of all ages together

12 “for cozy, homemade fun through the timeless art of live  
13 puppetry.”

14 *The Commons* spoke recently with Jana Zeller, who has  
15 been working with Sandglass since she was a teenager. Having  
16 “officially” joined the staff last year, the daughter of Sandglass  
17 founders Eric Bass and Ines Zeller Bass is now Sandglass’ youth  
18 program coordinator, as well as a performer and co-producer.

19 “I have a lot of irons in the fire over here,” she says.

20 With her sister, Shoshana Bass, puppeteer and Sandglass’  
21 co-artistic director, Zeller has been co-producing the winter event  
22 for the past 10 years.

23 Offering two shows every Saturday in February, Zeller  
24 said the Winter Series represents a range of puppetry traditions  
25 and styles.

26 “We really pay a lot of attention to whom we invite,” she  
27 said. “Our artists are award-winning leaders in our regional  
28 puppet community. We feel it’s special that we have a venue here  
29 where we can invite our audiences and connect them with such  
30 quality work.”

31 This year’s Winter Sunshine opens Saturday, Feb. 7 with  
32 Brad Shur’s *Cardboard Explosion* from Poughkeepsie, New York.  
33 “This is a super imaginative show,” said Zeller. “Everything is  
34 built out of cardboard and [three different] stories get assembled  
35 in front of the audience with some audience participation.”

36 Featured Feb. 14 is *Modern Times Theater* from  
37 Hardwick, Vermont. “They’re bringing a vaudeville-style show,”  
38 explained Zeller. “Extremely funny.”

39 The “Baffo Box Show: A Compact Cardboard Comedy,”  
40 is performed inside a one-of-a-kind suitcase stage. “This fast-  
41 paced, all-ages comedy blends classic hand puppetry, object  
42 manipulation, junk music, and sharp humor,” according to the  
43 show’s publicity materials.

44 On Saturday, Feb. 21 one can see Puppets Motion’s “Party  
45 Animals, which Zeller said is “a brand-new hand puppet show  
46 coming from Sarah Nolen in Boston.” The news release

47 elaborates: “Five furry friends face their biggest challenge yet:  
48 throwing their very first party. Through rock ‘n’ roll music, hand  
49 puppetry, and heart, this lively show explores self-expression,  
50 friendship, and joy.”

51 The series closes Saturday, Feb. 28 — school vacation  
52 week — with Tanglewood Marionettes’ “Fairy Circus,” which  
53 Zeller calls “traditional, beautiful, hand-carved marionettes in  
54 elaborate painted sets.”

55 This showcase features more than 20 marionettes  
56 performing dazzling tricks to beloved classical music.

## 57 **‘Laughing together and** 58 **breathing together’**

59 Zeller said that “this series is really close to our hearts.  
60 It’s community. It’s cozy. People get their hot chocolate and they  
61 bundle up to come here even in the worst weather. They pile into  
62 the theater and it just brings so much laughter and joy and  
63 enchantment — just a sense of belonging together and  
64 experiencing this together.”

65 When asked about the relevance of Sandglass’ work in  
66 these times of widely-sourced threats to free and creative  
67 expression, Zeller said that people “need live, interactive,  
68 creative, imagination-sparking spaces where you experience  
69 texture, you experience life, [you hear] sound, you see  
70 movement, you see somebody messing up and working through  
71 it and laughing together and breathing together.”

72 “More than ever, in our digital era, we all know all the  
73 circumstances we’re working with now,” she continued. “And I  
74 feel our work just speaks to the imagination and really gets  
75 people of all ages — children of all ages — fired up.”

76 Of its tangible impact, Zeller said, “We often have kids  
77 walking out of here with their own ideas of what they’re going to  
78 build at home — to make their own — because with puppetry  
79 you can make it yourself. You can make it out of cardboard, you

80 can use a bottle with an apple on the top as a puppet, it doesn't  
81 matter. There're so many ways to engage with this medium."

82 Zeller also teaches puppetry in school residencies.

83 "I can't believe how valuable it now seems to just use  
84 scissors and tie a knot," she said.

85 "All these super-basic things" that might seem  
86 completely unimportant "suddenly feel like they are becoming  
87 absolutely crucial to keeping connected to our humanness,"  
88 Zeller continued. "Using our hands and our imagination — that  
89 connection of bringing an idea to life."

90 Of Winter Sunshine Series audiences over the years,  
91 which Sandglass is always "working on growing," Zeller notes  
92 "they're really sweet — sort of quintessential Vermont. And  
93 intergenerational. Sometimes we have three generations  
94 attending. We've seen kids grow up and then bring their own  
95 kids. It's wonderful."

## 96 **Critical funding**

97 The series is funded by grants and local sponsorship. "In  
98 these times that are hard for arts organizations, we cherish the  
99 support and partnerships we have in the community," Zeller  
100 stresses, touching on the current state of the arts.

101 "Theaters, presenters, we can't run on just selling tickets.  
102 So we do rely on external funding and with the closing of the  
103 National Endowment for the Arts, we definitely have seen  
104 shortages that affect our budget. But other people are stepping  
105 up, it seems," she added, pointing to philanthropist MacKenzie  
106 Scott.

107 The former wife of Amazon titan Jeff Bezos has "donated  
108 a huge amount of money to the New England Foundation for the  
109 Arts, and that benefits so many places," Zeller said. "The hope is  
110 that more private people step up."

111 But, Zeller hastens to add, "we're lean and mean and  
112 scrappy. And so we will always make our programming work.  
113 And that's really what it takes.

114 Describing her sister as “really amazing,” she described  
115 the two as “creative thinkers and doers.”  
116 “So we just have to put our extra-resourceful creative  
117 thinking on,” Zeller said. “We’ll find ways for sure.”

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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118 Winter Sunshine Series shows are offered each Saturday  
119 in February at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. at wheelchair-accessible  
120 Sandglass Theater, 17 Kimball Hill, Putney. Ticket prices range  
121 from \$8 to \$12 and, since seating is limited, advance purchase is  
122 encouraged at [sandglasstheater.org/winter-sunshine-series](http://sandglasstheater.org/winter-sunshine-series).

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