



Rock the Boat

SANDGLASS THEATER's *Rock the Boat*, a touring puppet show for young audiences grades Pre-K through 5th, explores themes of refugees, inclusion and respectful curiosity. A Poet in a boat, alone at sea, is stuck in a rut of writer's block. While observing his daily routines, he suddenly finds his home filling with new characters seeking shelter and safety. Through evocative visual scenes, we learn that each has fled some disaster: war, fire or flood. As the newcomers and the Poet navigate life together on the vessel, they meet conflict, generosity, kindness and questions about who each other are. The Poet's poems become richer and deeper and the unlikely collection of beings learns to steer threatening waters together.

The multi-ethnic ensemble includes Slam-poet D. Colin, composer Julian Gerstin and students from two elementary schools in Southern Vermont. The students participated in poetry, storytelling and music workshops with the creative team. These workshops were integrated with their class curriculum and the student's voices contribute to the script, study guide and residency model.

Rock the Boat aims to get young audiences thinking about relocation, displacement and the interconnectedness of racial, climate and social justice. The production addresses attitudes about acceptance of those who come from other countries and cultures, and provides a narrative in which there is room for everyone in an inclusive society. For ages 4 and up.

Video Link - <https://vimeo.com/387979537>

Image Link- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/186903406@N02/albums/72157713070414758>

Credits

Conceived and created by Sandglass Theater

Directed by Eric Bass

Poetry by D. Colin

Music by Julian Gerstin

Designed by Ines Zeller Bass and Jana Zeller

The Ensemble: Shoshana Bass, Kalob Martinez, Kaitee Yaeko Tredway

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Artist Bios

Eric Bass, Director

Eric has worked for thirty years as a director, playwright, performer, and mask and puppet maker. In 1982, Eric co-founded Sandglass Theater in Munich, Germany, with his wife, Ines Zeller Bass. In 1991, he was awarded the Figurentheater Prize of the City of Erlangen, Germany for his contributions to the field of puppet theater. In 2010, Eric and Ines Zeller Bass received the Vermont Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. He co-directed *The Story of the Dog*, a collaborative piece between Sandglass Theater and Sovanna Phum Theater in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, which toured Cambodia in 2005 and the US in 2006. He co-directed *Natan el Sabio*, a collaborative project with Teatro Luis Poma in El Salvador. Eric toured in the Sandglass production of *D-Generation*, a piece about people with dementia. Eric is also co-director for the original Sandglass production of *Babylon: journeys of refugees*. He served on the board of the Network of Ensemble Theaters.

Ines Zeller Bass, Puppet and Set Designer/Builder

Ines has been performing with puppets since 1968, when she became a member of the Munich marionette theater, Kleines Spiel. In 1978, she created her children's hand puppet theater, *PUNSCHI*, which toured Europe, Australia and the US. In 1982, Ines co-founded Sandglass Theater with husband Eric. Ines started Sandglass Theater's program for family audiences. Together with Eric, she teaches their approach to puppetry performance and devised composition in workshops in Vermont and abroad. She designed the puppets and set for *Natan El Sabio*, a collaborative project with Teatro Luis Poma in El Salvador. Ines' puppets and design for *Babylon: journeys of refugees* include two of her many crankies. Ines toured in the Sandglass production of *D-Generation*, a piece about people with dementia. An UNIMA citation winner, Ines also received the Vermont Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in 2010.

D. Colin, Writer

Danielle has been writing poetry since age 11. As a teenager, Danielle's poetry was a personal outlet and rarely shared with others. Danielle has B.A. in English, with concentrations in African American literature and creative writing. She also holds Masters degrees in English and in Africana Studies, concentrating in African American literature and creative writing. Her poetry work has also involved teaching poetry workshops especially for teenagers. Danielle was the poet-in-residence for Sandglass' 2016 Voices of Community Week. Her poetry strongly expresses her feelings, insights, and imagery as a child of Haitian immigrants. This poetic style dovetails with Sandglass' own precise and evocative use of puppetry. Sandglass' production, *Rock the Boat*, will be written in Danielle's voice, capturing the narrative style of a Haitian-American slam poet. Using this voice helps young audiences connect with the play's themes, and poses the question: What can WE do to help?

Julian Gerstin, Composer

Julian has performed and studied a wide variety of music for over 40 years. His main styles are traditions of Martinique, Cuba, Ghana (Ewe) and Brazil; popular music from those same countries as well as Nigeria, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and other Caribbean islands; Balkan music; and jazz. He has performed styles ranging from punk to choral music, Mexican son to zydeco.

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The Ensemble

Shoshana Bass, Performer/Project Director

Shoshana Bass is co-Artistic director and ensemble performer with Sandglass Theater in Putney, Vermont in the United States. She grew up touring internationally with the theater founded by her parents and now performs their legacy work as well as her own devised work. Her training consists of a range of physical performance disciplines spanning across theater, dance, puppetry and circus. She works as a performer, teacher, director and choreographer around the world. She is the director of Sandglass' Puppets in the Green Mountains International Festival, and produces programs and events in puppetry for all ages.

Kalob Martinez, Performer

Kalob has performed with Connecticut Repertory Theatre, Alley Theatre (Houston), Main Street Theatre (Houston), Houston Shakespeare Festival, and was an Associate Artist for the Classical Theatre Company (Houston) 2009-2013. He is an MFA candidate in the Puppet Arts Program at the University of Connecticut, where he created his solo production, *El Beto*, based on Shakespeare's *MacBeth*. Kalob is also a Fight Choreographer. Kalob is also a core ensemble member in Sandglass' production of *Babylon* and has been essential to developing the project from its first creation period.

Kaitae Yaeko Tredway, Performer

Kaitae Tredway is a Boston-based puppeteer and actor. She is an alumna of the National Puppetry Festival at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, where she has studied with international puppet artists Hugo & Ines and Yael Rasooly. She has performed original short-form puppet pieces at the Puppet Showplace Slam, Puppet Playlist, and Drama of Works Kamikazee Slam. In October 2020 she was part of the puppeteer ensemble in Martin P. Robinson's new Halloween musical, *All Hallows' Eve*.

Why *Rock the Boat* Matters Now

Sandglass has been engaged with the themes of refugees and asylum seekers for many years through our work on *Babylon: journeys of refugees*, which wrestles with issues of resettlement, displacement, and humanization of the "other". This project, created for high school to adult age audiences, brought us into close relationship with USCRI Vermont (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants) and the personal testimonies of many people who had been resettled in our home state. Through touring and developing this work, we realized that there was an age group we were not reaching: young audiences, future voters, and specifically the demographic of our state that was seeing the most change of diversity in their classrooms.

As the past year has so poignantly shown, the underlying systemic social, climate and racial injustice that persists in everything from day-to-day actions to institutional practices causes significant harm and binds us all to a culture and environment of exclusion and disparity. *Rock the Boat* aims to be part of the conversation that supports systemic change and offers a different possibility for our youth. The show speaks to inclusion and how we practice respectful curiosity about those who speak another language, look different than we do, or come from other cultures. In development, the theme expanded to encompass displacement due to climate disaster as well as war, and drives us toward imagining a microcosm of a world in which differences are worked out, and everyone has room in an inclusive society.

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Community and School Engagement Options

Though conceived as a live production, we developed a film of this work to continue to deliver an important message during socially distanced times, and keep art and performance accessible as an educational right. A residency may include an extensive study guide, Question and Response sessions, class visits and workshop offerings that are supportive of teaching curriculum and offer a way to engage young students in these issues in a grade appropriate manner that integrates compassion, learning and self expression.

Residency Feedback

"Our 4th, 5th and 6th grade students had the privilege to work with dedicated and professional artists to explore the issues of refugees through a project brought to us through Sandglass Theater. By using the avenue of music, poetry, storytelling, and puppetry they were able to safely explore difficult concepts of displacement, loss, and disequilibrium."

-Kathy Richardson, Grammar School teacher, Putney Vermont

"One of the highlights of the 2020-2021 academic year here at the University of Southern Mississippi's School of Performing and Visual Arts was hosting Sandglass Theatre for a virtual residency. Through this residency, our community of artists were able broaden their knowledge of storytelling through puppetry. This has been a challenging season for us. Visiting with and hearing from the talented ensemble members who created *Rock the Boay*, gave us all the much needed inspiration we needed to continue our own work in this pandemic."

-Kelly James Penot, University of Southern Mississippi

"Working with Sandglass Theater as they birthed the virtual production of *Rock the Boat* has been one of the highlights in my decade long career of presenting k-12 programming for Global Arts series at the University of Massachusetts. While the experience of viewing a live performance is difficult to duplicate, in some respects the film was even better for our audiences. The editing, close ups, and camera angles of the filmed performance engaged our younger audience members in ways that effectively broke through the fourth wall—and the feedback from our audiences teachers, parents, students and children alike was 100% positive, not one negative comment! The Sandglass Theater staff was a joy to work with, always punctual to our virtual tech rehearsals and flexible in supporting any adjustments we needed to ensure a high quality art experience for our audiences."

-Sue McFarland, University of Massachusetts Fine Arts Center

From Students and Parents at Greenfield Public School

"When you made the snail walking I didn't even notice that you and Katie were moving the puppets." --student

"It was made in a way that all kids could understand the messages." --parent

"What I liked was that all the puppets played together." --student

"I like the snail the best; he's like a kid." --student

"I really like when the puppets cut the towel and made the dress. It was funny." --student

About Sandglass Theater

Sandglass Theater is an internationally renowned theater company specializing in combining puppets with music, actors and visual imagery. Since 1982, the company's productions have

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toured to nearly 30 countries, performing in theaters, festivals and cultural institutions and winning numerous international prizes. Sandglass Theater produces works for adult audiences and young audiences—two repertoires that tour separately and together. Sandglass also performs and teaches in its own 60-seat renovated barn theater in Putney, Vermont. Sandglass Theater is available for workshops and residencies.

Sandglass Staff

Founders Eric Bass and Ines Zeller Bass
Artistic Directors Eric Bass and Shoshana Bass
Managing Director Alissa Mello
Producers Kirk Murphy and Jana Zeller
Administrator Aurora Corsano

Sandglass Board

President Brad Heck
Secretary Julian Gerstin
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Eric Bass, Ines Zeller Bass, Victoria Mitchell,
Virginia Scholl, Michael Szostak

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Photo by Willow O’Feral

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