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Babylon: Journeys of Refugees

SANDGLASS THEATER's action-packed, high-energy production is a response to the worldwide refugee crisis and its impact on communities in the United States. Working with the USCRI Vermont (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants), we seek to understand the challenges that face refugees and asylum seekers. Sandglass conducted research and interviews with new residents who immigrated to the US in order to gain insight into their plight and the challenges of resettlement. *Babylon* looks at the relationship of refugees to their homelands, lost and new, and the conflicts that exist within the countries to which they flee.

Using puppets and moving panoramic scrolls, five actor/singer/puppeteers tell refugees' stories in original four-part choral songs. Our show is portable and accessible to a range of venue configurations in order to be able to play in diverse spaces and communities. Residencies can include a selection of workshops and community engagement opportunities. For ages 14 and up.

The Refugee Journey workshop

Community workshops presented through the *Babylon* residency project engage participants through facilitated discussions that stem from a "board game" created by USCRI Vermont's Laurie Stavrand. The game, called *Refugee Journey*, recreates the emotional experience of trying to bring refugee "pieces" to safety. Throughout the game, participants draw cards that tell parts of true refugee stories, and move the game pieces forward or backward on the board. Sandglass performers play the roles of border guards, smugglers, medical officers, and immigration interviewers. These characters directly confront participants in order to personalize the refugee experience in all its danger, unfairness, and bureaucracy. Frequently, the game puts a player in the situation of having to make an impossible choice, and these experiences are processed during post-game discussions. The game is over when time is up, or when one person reaches resettlement. The game's conclusion represents the statistic that only 1% of refugees ever reach a new homeland.

The game, *Refugee Journey*, was created by Laurie Stavrand in collaboration with Jana Zeller (design) and Sandglass Theater.

Workshop duration: 90 minutes.

Number of participants: approx. 20 (but can be up to 30)

Age range: High school and older

Video Link - <https://vimeo.com/618957955>

Image Link- <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmLkqm3c>

Requisite credit: **Photographs by Willow O'Feral**

Development of *Babylon: Journeys of Refugees* was made possible with funding by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Theater Project, with lead funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and additional support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts, The Fresh Sound Foundation, The Jim Henson Foundation, The McKenzie Family Charitable Trust, The Vermont Community Foundation, The National Performance Network with commissions from The Flynn Center, Portland Ovations, and Columbia College Chicago Center for Community Arts Partnerships.

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Credits

Conceived and created by Sandglass Theater

Directed by Eric Bass

Directorial Collaborator for first staging Roberto Salomon

Designed by Ines Zeller Bass

The Ensemble: Shoshana Bass, Kalob Martinez, Raphael Sacks, Divyamaan Sahoo,
Kaitee Yaeko Tredway

Puppets by Ines Zeller Bass with Jana Zeller

Crankies by Ines Zeller Bass and Jana Zeller

Songs composed by Brendan Taaffe, lyrics by Eric Bass

Percussion score by Julian Gerstin

Choral Director Becky Graber, Rapheal Sacks

Artistic Collaboration Rowan Ching, Ron Domingo, Molly Gawler, Jay Gelter, Dey Hernandez,
Terrell Jones, Linda Tardif, Alan White

Immigration interviewer Keeley Eastly

Voice recording by Finn Campman

Projection and Sound design by Maria Pugnetti

Set building Zak Grace

Touring Technical Direction by Jamie Keithline

Conflict Transformation Training John Ungerleider

Film by Haptic Pictures

Filming *Technical Direction by Maria Pugnetti*

Created in cooperation with USCRI Vermont:

Amila Merdzanovic, *Director*

Laurie Stavrand, *Program Officer*

*Thanks to Dina Nayeri for the use of her texts from "The Ungrateful Refugee,"
as published in The Guardian in 2017.*

*The game of Refugee Journey created by Laurie Stavrand in collaboration with
Jana Zeller (design) and Sandglass Theater.*

**Thank you to the many refugees from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the
Congo, Iraq, and Somalia who told us their stories.**

Who is a refugee?

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries. Find out more: <http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/>



Directors' Notes

Eric Bass

It was Ines who proposed this project. Perhaps it was her perspective as a German, watching the waves of refugees trying to make their way to northern Europe. The US is further away, and, for some time, our perspective was more distant. It was our meeting with Amila Merdzanovic, and later Laurie Stavrand, from Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, that really started to bring these stories home. Amila and Laurie taught us that these are not adventure stories. These refugee stories are stories of trauma. We had to work to earn their trust, and that trust building was some of the most important and informative work we did on this project. It taught us to take nothing for granted, especially when it comes to what it really means for someone to tell his/her/their story. Our facebook pages are full of all of our day to day experiences, but the deeper stories, the stories that lie at the root of our trauma and our survival, are harder to hear. To tell these stories is to live them again, and they are not stories that one wants to relive. These stories lie at the root of our dignity and our quality of life. We have learned, through trust building, to value these stories as we value human life.

Ines Zeller Bass

I was born right after WWII. Everyone from the maternal side of my family had to leave their home and flee from the far Eastern side of Germany into the West. I remember stories that were shared by friends and family members around the kitchen table, stories that described bombs, burning cities, flight, Russian soldiers, hiding, endless and dangerous train rides, hungry and crying children, American soldiers handing out chocolate, and so much more. Back then, in my child's imagination, it seemed like a world filled with excitement and adventure and it was only much later that I started to understand the underlying emotional and physical hardship in those tellings. Maybe it is because of these childhood memories and impressions that I feel very connected and compelled to get closer to our puppet characters in *Babylon*, not only to tell their stories but to live a moment of their life together.

Roberto Salomon

Normally, I direct challenging contemporary and classical playwrights with actors. Working with Sandglass is always exciting, as we develop original projects from material Sandglass has previously researched. Whether it be facing the world of ageing processes in *D-Generation*, investigating the uprooting and alienation of individuals in *One-Way Street*, or combining music, choral work and puppetry in *Babylon*. It is quite enriching. I jump, as it were, on already fast-moving trains.

My father, a WWI orphan, emigrated to El Salvador in 1928, fleeing post-war depression in eastern France. My mother fled Nazi-menaced France in 1939. Both left El Salvador at the onset of the civil war, almost 50 years later. I left El Salvador with my family from one day to the next in 1981. Migration, displacement, refugees, adaptation and learning new customs and world-views are familiar themes to me.



Artist Biographies

Eric Bass, Co-Director

Co-Founding Artistic Director of Sandglass, has worked for over forty years as a director, playwright, performer and mask and puppet maker. In 1982, Mr. Bass founded Sandglass Theater in Munich, Germany, with his wife, Ines Zeller Bass. As a stage director, Eric has worked on four continents and his signature solo work, *Autumn Portraits*, toured around the world for three decades. His international projects include co-directing *The Story of the Dog* with Sovanna Phum Theater in Cambodia, *Natan el Sabio* with Teatro Luis Poma in El Salvador, and a puppet production of Tennessee Williams *Glass Menagerie* for Theater Waidspeicher in Germany. Eric toured for six years in the Sandglass production of *D-Generation: An Exaltation of Larks*, a piece about people with dementia, and continues to travel with *Babylon: Journeys of Refugees*, Sandglass' puppetry and song exploration of the issues of fleeing war and violence and of how asylum seekers are received in a new homeland. Eric served for five years on the board of the Network of Ensemble Theaters. In 2010, he received the Vermont Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. Eric is currently working on a new production with playwright and performer Linda Parris-Bailey from Tennessee. The piece, *Flushing*, explores the importance of things and values that we pass on to the next generation.

Roberto Salomon, Directorial Collaborator for First Staging

Since 2003, Roberto Salomon has directed the Teatro Luis Poma, the first privately owned theater functioning year-round in his native El Salvador. In Geneva, Switzerland, he has been directing and teaching theater for the past 25 years. This is his third production with Sandglass Theater. Roberto is also the co-director of the recent *Natan el Sabio*, a collaboration between TLP and Sandglass in El Salvador, a production hailed as "a mouthful of fresh air" in a country currently beset by violence. Roberto is the director of Sandglass' *D-Generation: An Exaltation of Larks*, for which we won the Best Director award at the 2013 Puppeteers of America festival.

Ines Zeller Bass, Puppet and Stage Design

Ines Zeller Bass, Co-Founding Artistic Director of Sandglass, 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 has toured Europe, Australia and the US. In 1982, Ines co-founded Sandglass Theater with husband Eric in Germany and moved the theater to Vermont in the mid-1980s. 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*, Sandglass Theater's production, include two of her many crankies. Ines has last been touring with Sandglass' production of *D Generation, An Exaltation of Larks*, a piece about people with dementia. She is an UNIMA citation winner and in 2010, received the Vermont Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. Ines has retired from touring but is still very connected to Sandglass through her designs and puppet building, including puppets for Eric's new collaboration with playwright and performer Linda Paris-Bailey. Ines has also built the Little Merrill puppet for Tune Yard's new music video.

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Brendan Taaffe, Composer

Based in Vernon, Vermont, Brendan Taaffe is a composer and multi-instrumentalist whose songs have been performed by choirs throughout North America and Europe. Drawing from the cadences of early American hymnody, Taaffe's choral settings are hymns for the modern world, exploring the same eternal questions of mortality, love, and home from a non-denominational eye. Brendan is the director of The Bright Wings Chorus, and many of his original compositions are included on their four recordings: *Here Below*, *Signs and Wonders*, *Vineyard*, and *No Time To Tarry*. He is also a frequent leader with *Village Harmony* and has had work included in the most recent edition of *Northern Harmony*, a collection of contemporary shape note hymns. Brendan holds a master's degree in performance from the University of Limerick. More at brendantaaffe.com.

Julian Gerstin, Percussion

Julian Gerstin, composer/percussionist, has appeared with bands ranging from the traditions of Martinique (where he lived for two years), Cuba, Puerto Rico and Ghana to experimental jazz, afrobeat legends Orlando Julius and Baba Ken Okulolo to punk icon Richard Hell, and has worked with musicians from Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, Macedonia, Bosnia, and many other countries. Julian's current major project is the Julian Gerstin Sextet, which has released two CDs of his jazz-meets-world music compositions. He holds an MFA in Music Composition and a PhD in Anthropology, and has published in numerous academic journals. Since 2010 Julian has served as President of the Board of the Vermont Jazz Center, where he also teaches.

Jana Zeller, Stage Design

Jana has been drawing and painting since she was a child. She trained for many years as an oil painter and portrait painter, worked as a set painter for the theater, the TV and movie industry, and the opera. As one of the daughters of Sandglass Theater, she began painting puppets, sets and props early on, and later became a working puppeteer creating original shows that have been presented in the US, Canada, Mexico, Germany, and India. She performs and teaches puppetry across New England, and art classes for children in her studio in Brattleboro, Vermont.

Haptic Pictures, Film Production

Haptic Pictures is a production company focusing on social justice storytelling, founded by award-winning filmmakers Willow O'Feral and Brad Heck. Together they have produced, directed and lensed two feature-length documentaries, *Sisters Rising* and *Break the Silence: Reproductive and Sexual Health Stories*, and work with clients and friends on a wide range of commissioned projects. Their documentary *Sisters Rising*, about six Native American women fighting to restore personal and tribal sovereignty in the face of ongoing sexual and colonial violence against Indigenous women in the US, has received enormous recognition including being awarded Best Film from the Women's Voices Film Festival, Best Documentary Feature Award 2020 from the American Indian Film Festival. *Sisters Rising* will broadcast nationally on PBS with America ReFramed in 2021. *Break the Silence* was honored with Best Documentary by La Frontera Queer Film Festival and awarded New England Planned Parenthood's Choice Champion Award. Haptic Pictures is based in Southern Vermont.

Maria Pugnetti, Film Technical Direction

Maria Pugnetti is an interdisciplinary artist who has been working in the Southern Vermont Theater community as an intermedia designer and technician for over ten years. Maria holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of California, Santa Cruz and has studied puppetry with Sandglass Theatre and with Stephen Kaplin of Chinese Theatre Works. Her theater work includes scenic painting, projection design, and sound and lighting design. www.woolyamar.com

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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, Ensemble Performer

Kalob Martinez is an actor who combined his professional interests in stage combat and voice acting and found puppetry. His solo show, *El Beto* stands as the culmination of his theatrical endeavors in puppet arts, and in 2019 he received a Jim Henson Foundation grant for this show. He is currently an associate artist and ensemble member of Sandglass Theater's, *Babylon: Journeys of Refugees*, and plays the Hippo in Sandglass' virtual production for young audiences of *Rock the Boat*. He voiced and served as the puppeteer for Arthur Fiedler twice with the Boston Pops as narrator for *Peter and the Wolf* and *A Visit from St. Nick*. He is currently a Company Artist for the Classical Theatre Company (CTC) in Houston, TX, and for five seasons (2008-2013) he was an Associate Artist. In 2020 his work for CTC's *Peer Gynt* was awarded Best Use of Puppetry by the Houston Press Theatre Awards. He has performed as the mascots, Buster Brackets and Fantasy Frank, for the *Tournament Marathon Challenge* (2017-2019) and the *Fantasy Football Marathon* (2018) both on ESPN.

Raphael Sacks, Ensemble Performer, Music Director

Raphael Sacks is a singer, dancer and theater maker from New York City, recently transplanted to Springfield Vermont with his own dance-theater company Loom Ensemble (LoomEnsemble.com), in residence at the Art Monastery Vermont (ArtMonastery.org) on the banks of the Connecticut River.

Divyamaan Sahoo, Ensemble Performer

Divyamaan Sahoo from Calcutta, India received his BA from Bates College in 2017 and his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2020. He joined Sandglass Theater in 2017 and is honored to return in 2021 to perform in the filmed production of *Babylon: Journeys of Refugees*.

Kaitee Yaeko Tredway, Ensemble Performer

Kaitee Yaeko Tredway is a puppeteer and theater maker. In addition to *Babylon: Journeys of Refugees*, Kaitee also appears in Sandglass's production of *Rock the Boat*. In the fall of 2019, she performed in the ensemble of Martin P. Robinson's *All Hallows' Eve*. Her original work to date consists of short-form puppet pieces presented at puppet slams in both Boston and NYC. She has studied with international puppet artists Hugo & Ines and Yael Rasooly at the National Puppetry Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center. Credits on stage and behind the scenes in Boston include the Lyric Stage Company, Company One, imaginary beasts, and Wheelock Family Theatre. You can find her online at www.kaiteetredway.com.

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About Sandglass Theater

Sandglass Theater is an internationally celebrated theater company renowned for combining puppets with music, actors and visual imagery. Since 1982, the company's productions have toured to over 30 countries, performing in theaters, festivals and cultural institutions, and winning numerous international prizes.

Sandglass Theater produces works for both 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 and teaches a 2-week intensive training program each summer.

Sandglass Staff

Sandglass 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 Virginia Driscoll

Sandglass Board

President Brad Heck

Treasurer William Ploog

Secretary Julian Gerstin

Eric Bass, Ines Zeller Bass, Janice Leary-Jones, Victoria Mitchell, Virginia Scholl, Michael Szostak

Press Quotes

"A show that needs to be seen by everyone, as it raises awareness of a massive challenge to countries all over the world." - Andrew Periale, Puppetry International #44, Fall 2018

"Again and again I am also awed by the sensitivity and nuance Sandglass brings to difficult subjects. This expertise will be brought to bear once again in the telling of the immigrant story. At its core, this is a story about the endurance of the human spirit. However, we also recognize how the topic of immigration has become charged and politicized. We need Sandglass, the power of their art, and the magic of puppetry to have this conversation in our community." -Aimée M. Petrin, Executive & Artistic Director of Portland Ovations

"Babylon beautifully and poignantly portrays the journeys and tribulations of the refugees and asylum seekers whom we care for. Beyond that, the show highlights the tensions in our society around these issues, and the challenge of overcoming fear and bigotry. I was impressed at how vividly the performers, through the puppets and through music, capture the shared humanity and injustice that motivate our work and are so critical to share with others." -Dr. James S. Miller, MD MPH MGH Global Medicine/MGH Asylum Clinic



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