

# PUPPET MASTERS

Siblings ride into Rockland with 'Banana Kid'

By Christine Dunkle



Brothers Erik and Brian Torbeck and sister Robin (Torbeck) Erlandsen make up Frogtown Mountain Puppeteers. The troupe performs Jan. 4 at Rockland's Strand Theatre.

Kids and kids-at-heart can't help but smile at those googly-eyed gals and felt-covered fellas that have entertained generations from the street of Sesame to the Muppets' stage, and there's nothing quite like seeing them live.

Frogtown Mountain Puppeteers is a puppetry troupe based in Bar Harbor and comprised of three siblings — brothers Erik and Brian Torbeck and sister Robin (Torbeck) Erlandsen. Their "The Legend of the Banana Kid" kicks off the 2020 Strand Family Series Saturday, Jan. 4, at 11 a.m.

"As far as working and traveling together goes... luckily we're all pretty laid back, so we haven't tried to kill each other too much," Erik said. He thinks it is a huge benefit to work on shows with people you have grown up with. "We have similar experiences to draw from, and similar ideas and styles, so we rarely argue over major issues because we typically have a shared vision of how we'd like the shows to go."

In "Banana Kid," Little Chucky heads to the Wild West to outwit



"The Legend of the Banana Kid" kicks off the 2020 Strand Family Series Jan. 4.

outlaws in a cowboy adventure. With a fistful of bananas, Chucky rides into town on his trusty goat for a showdown with Big Bart and his band of bandits. The show features 20 hand-crafted glove, mouth and rod puppets; and a slew of flying and twirling Styrofoam bananas.

The story of the group's beginning is certainly not an age-

old one. Or maybe it is. Adulting after years in school can take the fresh graduate down some interesting roads. Erik had taken a college class in puppetry at College of the Atlantic and ended up making a puppet movie for his senior project.

"After graduation, in an effort to make some money — and not get jobs — Brian and Erik started making puppets to sell at craft fairs," Robin said. Thinking it would be more fun to perform, they were hired by the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire to put on a puppet show for children. Robin joined in, and after she graduated from college, the trio created and performed its first full-length show — "The Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow" — in 2000 in Bar Harbor.

"A teacher saw our show and invited us to her school, a librarian invited us to her library, and more invitations kept coming over the next few years," Robin said. "After about five years we realized that we could quit our other jobs and perform full-time."

Frogtown has received three Citations of Excellence from UNIMA-USA, the highest national award in puppetry. After nearly



Little Chucky, the "Banana Kid," takes on Big Bad Bart and his gang of bandits.



Velocipede

## Contra dance takes a spin with Velocipede

Join Belfast Flying Shoes for an evening of contra dancing at American Legion Post #43, 143 Church St., on Friday, Jan. 3.

The festivities begin at 6:30 p.m. with a Community Dance called by Chrissy Fowler and with music by the All Comers Band. All musicians are welcome to sit in. Fun and simple dances will be taught, giving beginners the opportunity to learn new skills and offering experienced dancers a chance to brush up on their steps.

The Contra Dance begins at 8 p.m. with caller Dugan Murphy. Based in Portland, Murphy is a nationally-known contra dance caller, co-organizer of the Portland Intown Contra Dance, a Maine humorist, a voice artist, and a storyteller. His calling, which manages to be both chill and energizing, has earned him an enthusiastic, far-flung following. This will be Murphy's first time calling a Flying Shoes dance, and the group is excited to welcome him to Belfast.

Sharing the Flying Shoes stage with Dugan will be Velocipede. An elegant and sprightly two-wheeled conveyance, Velocipede joins the talents of fiddler Julia Plumb and tenor guitarist Baron Collins-Hill. A former Flying Shoes board member and leader of

the All Comers Band, Plumb has traveled widely, studying the traditional dance music of New England, Quebec, Appalachia, Scandinavia, and the British Isles.

Along the way, she developed a fluid yet driving fiddling style and a keen sense for matching the tune to the dance. Collins-Hill grew up in Maine and graduated from Hampshire College with a degree in music performance and ethnomusicology. His tenor guitar playing reflects a sophisticated harmonic sense, a playful spirit, and a knack for getting a really big sound. Local favorites as both performers and instructors, the two met at Maine Fiddle Camp in Montville, where they teach each summer.

Sound is provided by Eric Weest Johnson. Admission to the Community Dance is \$2 for adults and \$1 for children. Admission to the Contra Dance is \$10 for adults, \$8 for ages 13 to 20 and adult All Comers, and \$5 for children. Bring along a window fan and get \$1 off. For more information, email [belfastflyingshoes@gmail.com](mailto:belfastflyingshoes@gmail.com), visit [belfastflyingshoes.org](http://belfastflyingshoes.org), or find the group on Facebook.



Dugan Murphy

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