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# Enjoy Funky Fun From 24 Colorado Artists Behind This New PBS Kids' Show

**CLAIRE DUNCOMBE | AUGUST 24, 2021 | 6:55AM**

“I told my husband, ‘Please find me a red cardigan,’” says Sarahndipity Johnsen, creator of the new **Rocky Mountain PBS television series *Enchanted Planet***. The kids' TV show will air Sunday mornings in September. Johnsen hopes the programming will forge “a real connection through mass media,” like the classic *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. The red sweater would be the perfect nod to that show.

*Enchanted Planet* is based on two children's book series Johnsen started writing in 2017 called ***Animals Get Funky*** and ***Animals Get Emotional***. Characters such as Grand Sappy the Wise Old Tree, Unhappy Urchin, Hip-Hop Hippopotamus and Happy Hedgehogs explore, communicate and teach about some of the nuances, challenges and joys of being a kid.

To create the show, 24 Colorado artists built a whimsical 3-D planet and brought Johnsen's animal characters and stories to life. Each episode provides a small dose of early childhood education.

“Our hope is to bring vibrant fun into exploring creativity,” Johnsen adds.

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The 27-minute episodes are divided into eight sections, including tinker time, in which children are introduced to different craft ideas; book readings; short Spanish classes; animal fun facts; dance parties; and sharing from families in the community who submit videos of themselves.

Kids and their families can submit “anything from magic shows to dancing to art pages,” Johnsen

says.



A moment of music during an *Enchanted Planet* episode. Featuring Chloe Brooke Watkins and Mateo and Rio Alexander. **Mark Till**

Johnsen has long dreamed that her book series would evolve into television. She says she's been telling people since the printing of her first book that someday the show would be on PBS.

"It's something that people have been able to watch grow, and it keeps growing. There's real inspiration there," she says. "I hope it inspires others to keep dreaming big, because you never know where that will go."

Johnsen's journey has been one of an educator who sought to teach outside the realm of public schools. "The public system wasn't serving the way I teach," she explains. "So often the way we have to teach is not so much through creative outlets."

Instead, Johnsen, who has a master's degree in education, found herself writing the *Animals Get Funky* children's books and building the nonprofit **We Create Heart**, which hosted dance parties, art parties and early education outreach in Grand Junction and at music festivals prior to the pandemic.

When COVID-19 restrictions limited gatherings, Johnsen saw the right conditions for the TV show to take form. Additionally, "so many gig workers were out of work. So many people that I value so much had all this time on their hands" she says. "We created [*Enchanted Planet*] to be a co-creation with

had all this time on their hands," she says. "We created [*Enchanted Planet*] to be a co-creation with the community. We couldn't make it without all the pieces of the community coming together."

A small group helped make a green screen in her living room so they could record safely, and they collaborated on set-props and backdrops. There are singers and performers such as **Chaz Roi**, who co-hosts the show; **Katie Gray**, from the bands Sea Stars and the Burned; Talia Keys, from **Talia Keys and the Love**; Zac Grant, from **Zolopht**; Chloe Brooke Watkins, from **Intuit**; and more. And the puppets in the show are made by **Folkmanis Puppets**, a family-run business operating since the 1960s.

Johnsen was even given permission to use some specific dance moves from **Anne Green Gilbert**, who has studied the effects of dance on neurological pathways. Dancing is a central part of *Enchanted Planet*. "I purposely wrote in the dance segments," Johnsen explains. "It's a really great way to get a little amount of energy out."

*Enchanted Planet* does include mention of the current issues kids face, such as segments that discuss Unhappy Urchin's sadness about needing to wear a mask.

Just like Mr. Rogers did for decades, says Johnsen, "we really saw the need to get mental health tools out to the community."

*Enchanted Planet* **will air every Sunday in September at 6:30 a.m. on Rocky Mountain PBS.** *Afterward, it will be available for streaming via **rockymountainpbs.org** or through **wecreateheart.org**.*

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