



# Deep Fried CURRIED Perogies



## What is a deep fried curried perogy?

Well, if German's are "krauts", and the British are "Spotted dick", then Deep Fried Curried Perogies are born when a Jamaican Filipino and a Ukrainian Brit start a family. In this feisty, comedic memoir, Michelle Todd shares the past of her Filipino mother and Jamaican father who left their tropic homelands behind to bring her into the wonderful non-tropic world of Edmonton, Alberta. This Fringe hit recounts what their collection plate of stories, recipes, heirlooms and hair trauma mean for Michelle and her baby's future. An exploration of what being Canadian means, and one woman's answer to the question, "Where do I come from?" Touching, funny, and smart – Deep Fried Curried Perogies is a real look at family legacy.

## History of the show

Impending motherhood prompted the questions - what if I have to make my son food for ethnic day at school? What am I going to make? Deep Fried Curried Perogies?! "How does one raise a Canadian? And just what does that mean exactly? My brother-in-law told me, "You're a product of multiculturalism." Canada is a hotbed of different cultures and we are very fortunate to be raised in a culture of multiculturalism. Our mix of heritage enriches us with our awareness of other religions, politics, customs, food, music, sports and fashion.

As the play (and my waistline) increased so did my patriotism, love and gratitude for my parents and my hometown. I realized what a mixed up child I was going to have (culturally speaking of course) and just how lucky my little Deep Fried Curried Perogy will be. The feedback I got from the audience "My own parents are...." led to bringing remounting DFCP. It was truly gratifying to witness that the things that are supposed to separate us actually bring us together to give us more common ground than our address.

-Michelle

## Michelle's Bio (Actor. Writer. Choreographer)

An Edmonton native, Michelle graduated from the GMCC Theatre program and with her fellow classmates started Edgewise Ensemble (*Don Juan in Chicago*, *Measure for Measure*, *Talk Radio Stalkers*). Other Edmonton Companies Michelle has performed with include Workshop West (Playwright's Garage), Unconscious Collective (*Swingin' Without Annette*, *Trippin'*), Theatre Network's NextFest (*Closet Space*), and Focus Productions (*Tony n' Tina's Wedding*), as well as Fringe Festivals in Saskatoon, Vancouver and Edmonton. Michelle has also worked on various film projects while in Edmonton and Toronto.

## Critics Agree

...a must see...

...engaging and tour-de-force comedy...

...intimate and endearing...

...funny and thought-provoking...

## The Edmonton Sun

It's All Black & White

One-woman show a witty, poignant look at race, culture

Mike Ross, 5 Suns (out of 5) \*\*\*\*\*

If you attend the excellent local festival we fondly refer to as "Meat on a Stick" - a.k.a. Heritage Days -- only to exclaim, "Where did all these foreigners come from?!" have yourself a heaping helping of Deep Fried Curried Perogies. You might learn something. For one thing, Edmonton is not as white bread as it seems. There's plenty of white rice, too. Michelle Todd's one-woman show is a walking, talking, dancing advertisement promoting Edmonton's surprising racial diversity. So many cultures, so many types of meat on a stick!

The show opens with a description of a mixed-race smorgasbord: Her dad is Jamaican, her mom is Filipina and she's having the baby of her white boyfriend whose parents are Ukrainian and British. Hence the title, eh? Our Heritage Days hero says she is the "darkest girl at the Filipino pavilion and the lightest girl at the Caribbean pavilion."

At heart, Todd's monologue is a vivid, funny and sometimes poignant coming-of-age story about a mixed-race kid born and raised in Edmonton, struggling to find out who she is and where she fits in. In fact, she knows all along: "I'm from Edmonton! I'm Canadian!" It's her friends, school-mates, family, the government - in short, everyone else - who her identity confusion. One memory includes, "My dad smiled at every black person he saw. I figured he knew them all." Nagging questions come up: "Will people mistake me for the nanny?" And from the deepest pit in hell - high school - comes this sobering observation: "The worst racism I ever faced was ... from the black girl community." But while pet peeves are aired (sample: "You sound white!"), Todd keeps the tone light throughout.

## See Magazine, November 25, 2004

### Divertingly diverse

#### Multi-talented multi-faceted multicultural romp

By Gilbert A. Bouchard

My niece Isabelle thinks most of her family is defective.

Her evidence for this malfunction: her paternal aunt, uncles and grandmother are incapable of understanding her when she speaks perfectly clearly in Russian, while her mom and maternal relatives can't understand her when she chatters away in mile-a-minute French. This is a very confusing situation for a precocious trilingual five year old, but not such an unusual condition when seen in a pan-Canadian context. With Canada becoming more diverse by the day and cross-cultural marriages become increasingly common, a growing number of children-like Isabelle-are being raised with their different feet in different ethnic realities. This is especially the case in expanding urban centers like Edmonton that have been reliant on global immigration for several generations.

Actor/writer Michelle Todd brings this fascinating social reality to life in her engaging and tour-de-force comedy *Deep Fried Curried Perogies*-a 2004 "Pick of the Fringe Hit" currently playing the PCL Stage in the TransAlta Arts Barns. This one-person show deftly and intelligently deconstructs a woman's eclectic upbringing boasting as she does a Filipino mother, a Jamaican father and the additional complication of her Filipino/Jamaican/Ukrainian child-on-the-way. (The title of the show arises from her considering what her child could bring to a kindergarten ethnic food day.)

One of the most energetic productions I've seen in years, Todd earns full points for both a seamless text and a velvety-smooth performance that covers a lot of ground, basically documenting a whole life-to-date being raised multi-culturally, without ever dragging dramatically or getting bogged down in unnecessary detail. For example, underlining the pressure that multi-cultural children face in having to learn aspects of all their various cultures-from food to language to dances-Todd performs a manic and hilarious Heritage Festival dance montage because "everybody dances for Heritage Days".

While mounting a uniformly entertaining and uplifting show, Todd doesn't pull any punches either, addressing lingering racial tensions with an even hand, especially as she rattles off the "pet peeves" of any Edmontonian who doesn't look or sound ethnically Anglo-Saxon (i.e., endlessly being asked where's she's really "from").

Kudos for Todd's ability to connect to her audience and walk that performance fine line, respecting the integrity of her serious and layered subject matter while producing a full-out entertaining evening that's both universal and oh-so grounded in a heartfelt and emotionally connected individual experience.



## See Magazine

Daniel Kaszor \*\*\*\*

*Deep Fried Curried Perogies* is an intimate and endearing if slightly unfocused portrayal of multi-ethnic life in Canada. Michelle Todd, an Edmonton native born of Jamaican and Filipino parents, explores what it was like growing up in Alberta and the trials of starting her own multiethnic family. Todd's story is relatively simple - it's just her on stage relating her story to the audience - but this simplicity is the reason the show works.

Todd is just a person whose life isn't so unlike yours, and the similarities help you relate to the differences. There is a lack of overall cohesiveness to the piece, but that lends itself to the feeling of being told a life story. Real life doesn't have a straight narrative or a thesis and neither does *Deep Fried Curried Perogies*; the slight lack of focus doesn't make the glimpse into Todd's life any less interesting. Well worth seeing.

She's an engaging performer, illustrating her points with parental impressions, hairstyling humour, sharp-witted pokes at stereotypes and a masterful facility at dances that range from the Macarena to Boot Scootin' Boogie. Never mind Edmonton's cultural melting pot. There's a mind-boggling amount of cultural diversity contained in just this one performer -ironically one of the most "together" performers at the Fringe this year.

## The StarPhoenix

By Shannon Boklaschuk \*\*\*1/2

The show must go on. Michelle Todd proved that old adage on Friday night, when a summer storm caused the electricity to go out at Off Broadway Arts Centre. Did Todd flee from the stage, upset at her bad luck? Not a chance. She performed much of her onewoman show by candlelight, with a flashlight shining in her face. That deserves kudos, and the audience was impressed with her determination. With tea light candles casting a warm glow on the stage, Todd continued to give it her all during the course of *Deep Fried Curried Perogies*. In addition to lighting problems, she also worked through technical issues involving the music with poise and confidence. She's the kind of performer who doesn't need electricity — her presence lights up the room.

So what is the play about? *Deep Fried Curried Perogies* is a memoir about Todd's life growing up in Edmonton with a Jamaican father and a Filipino mother. The play was born when Todd and her boyfriend — who's of British and Ukrainian heritage — learned they were having a baby together. The prospect of motherhood prompted Todd to ask questions about multiculturalism, ethnicity, her roots and what it means to be Canadian.

"What if I have to make my son food for ethnic day at school? What am I going to make? *Deep Fried Curried Perogies*?" Todd writes in her bio. "How does one raise a Canadian? And just what does that mean exactly?"

Although the show focused on some serious questions, much of *Deep Fried Curried Perogies* is humorous (there's a dance sequence that's particularly enjoyable). If the show has any weaknesses, however, it's that it goes on a bit too long and becomes a tad repetitive. It also lacks cohesion, with Todd flashing back to various ages and experiences without a real focus. Still, Todd is a gifted storyteller and her play is funny and thought-provoking. *Deep Fried Curried Perogies* is worth seeing.

## Vue Weekly

JSt\*\*\*\*

Canadians pride themselves on being open, liberal-minded people who harbour no racial stereotypes and welcome everyone with open arms. After all, we do have a cultural mosaic, right? Wrong. Despite the serious nature of racism, local writer/performer Michelle Todd's pontifications on growing up as a mixed child in Edmonton are funny and insightful without being too derisive. Tons of laughs about the '80s, inside jokes about E-town and a great soundtrack make this play a must see for any twenty-something who grew up hanging out on Whyte or chillin' at Heritage Days.

### The Gateway, November 18, 2004

**Melting pot not required when making Deep Fried Curried Perogies**  
by Scott C Bourgeois

Everyone has unusual stories they can relate about growing up, but for local playwright/actor/director Michelle Todd, those strange tales of youth inspired a one-woman play, Deep Fried Curried Perogies. Though the play deals with Todd's unique background of growing up in Edmonton with a Jamaican father and a Filipino mother, audiences will find plenty to identify with as the play explores the commonality we all share and the question of what it means to be a Canadian.

"You know what? We're all pretty much the same," says Todd. And, she explains, mothers are one of those things that everyone has in common. "Everyone could relate to stuff like mothers wanting to feed you, regardless of ethnicity; 'You're too skinny, you're too fat.'" Mind you, while everyone might relate to a mother wanting to plump up her brood, what Ma fattens the kiddies with is something a bit more particular, as Todd found out. "I didn't know that people didn't eat rice every day," recalls Todd with a laugh. "We were rice people. My mom probably knows thirty billion ways to make it: brown rice, fried rice, steamed rice, you name it. She should write a recipe book."

Interestingly, the idea of culturally specific dishes inspired the play. Todd decided to write the play after she discovered she was pregnant "It dawned on me: my boyfriend's Ukrainian and British, and I'm Jamaican and Filipino. We're going to raise a Canadian. ... What the hell does that mean?" For Todd, this also brought up other unusual questions. "What about our ethnicity? What are we going to do? What if [the baby] has to bring food from his culture, what am I going to do? What am I going to make? Deep fried curried perogies?"

After writing the show-the first full-length show that she has written on her own- Todd went on to perform it at the 2004 Edmonton Fringe Festival. The feedback she got was very positive. "A lot of people said how they wish their son or daughter could have seen it, because they have children of mixed ethnicity. Some very touching stories of the hardships you deal with when you're half and half, and you're shunned," she says. The play isn't just about Todd's background, growing up here in Edmonton, it's also a look into the heart of what being Canadian is all about. "I think Canada is great in the terms of-and I really do-how you can keep your cultural identity and not fall into accepting the mass. ... We're really more of a mosaic than a melting pot. Nobody's really expected to melt in; you can see each tile clearly." "It totally enriches us," she continues. "Being able to relate to, and identify with, other cultures. It makes us more understanding, which makes us less prone to war, and misunderstanding, and lack of communication."

## The Edmonton Journal

**New talent cooks up a cross-cultural treat**  
Alan Kellogg \*\*\*

Michelle is on the line to her parents back in Edmonton, a dad of Jamaican extraction, her mom a Filipino. Their baby girl - a Ross Sheppard grad - is trying to tell them she's preggers, living happily with Bob, a guy of anglo-Ukrainian descent. They won't even listen and it's driving her crazy. Somehow, the irritation of the moment transports Michelle back to her Meadowlark west-end roots. We're along for the ride, as she regales us with tales of growing up balancing the proud cultural underpinnings of her parents with the stereotyping inclinations of her classmates. For her part, she knows exactly who she is, especially since she's discovered hair mousse: a young woman from Edmonton. Period. She's got issues. Stow the Nubian princess thing, blow out the Filipino cutesy nicknames and don't knock the old hometown unless you're one of us. Her skinny sister might be mistaken for a guy, but she's blessed with the Caribbean full-figure genes.

Michelle Todd, who wrote and performs this one-woman show, is a confident and physically adept performer with a dazzling smile who uses her myriad dance chops to fine advantage on material stretching from Tone Loc to Irish step dancing. A bit on Heritage Days multicultural high-stepping is a particular hoot. Todd also shows promise in her writing, although the nastier side of her experience are left largely un-fleshed out, which might had added the heft she seems to be looking for. All things considered, it's a surprisingly polished and satisfying debut from a blooming talent we can be proud to call our own.

## BOOKING DEEP FRIED CURRIED PEROGIES

This play has also been performed at the following;

- University of Alberta's Diversity Institute Conference
- University of Alberta's Department of Secondary Education Conference
- Student Peace Conference sponsored by the Gandhi Foundation in conjunction with Ross Sheppard High School's Project R.E.D. (Rejecting Racism, Embracing Equality, Demanding Diversity)
- Edmonton Heritage Days Festival

If you would like to read more reviews or book this show for your event please visit my website [www.mahatmamajama.com](http://www.mahatmamajama.com) or contact me.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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