



see magazine

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.

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 (or a Jalipinukranibritinadian). In this feisty, comedic memoir, Michelle Todd shares the past of her Filipino mother and Jamaican father who left their tropic homelands behind to spice up 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 the question, "Where do I come from?"

Touching, funny, and smart - Deep Fried Curried Perogies is a real look at family legacy.

"See this." Montreal Gazette

"It rocked." The Calgary Herald

"...powerfully funny performance..." Toronto Star

"...most fully realized show I've seen..." Montreal Mirror

"...my picks that I just loved..." The Province

"gifted storyteller... funny and thought-provoking" The Star Phoenix

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Michelle's Bio (Actor. writer. choreographer)

An Edmonton native, Michelle has been active in the arts community for over 25 years as an actor, writer, choreographer, director, facilitator, and producer.

A graduate of MacEwan's Theatre Arts program Michelle most recently performed with Whizgigging Productions Catalyst, Saint Maggie Productions, Shadow Theatre, and Northern Light Theatre.

Michelle was 2020's recipient of Theatre Alberta's Michelle Dias Community Award and in 2022 she was recognized MacEwan's Community Builders Map. Her latest play *Hoodies* was written for Concrete Theatre's Anti-Racism and Change project for Theatre for Young Audiences.

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Deep Fried CURRIED perogies



BEST IN FEST
Winnipeg Fringe Festival

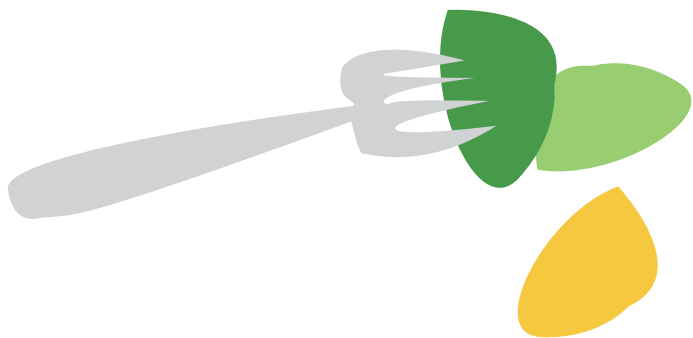
Pick of the
Fringe
Edmonton Sun

Critic's choice
nominee
Georgia Straight

★★★★★ Edmonton Sun

★★★★★ Winnipeg Free Press

Highly Recommended Toronto Star



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 what does that mean exactly? I was told, "You're a product of multiculturalism." Canada is a hotbed of different cultures and we're very fortunate to be raised among many cultures. 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, and my love and gratitude for my parents. 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 remounting DFCEP. It was truly gratifying to witness that the things that should separate us actually bring us together and give us more common ground than geography.
-Michelle

Events that Deep Fried Curried Perogies has performed at:

- Fringe Festivals in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, Saskatoon, Edmonton and Vancouver
- University of Alberta's
 - Diversity Institute Conference
 - 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
- Black History Month sponsored by the Jamaican Association of Manitoba
- Solo Performance Festival sponsored by the Theatre Off Jackson (Seattle)
- Centre For Family Literacy Conference
- Edson & District Community Learning Society
- Rocky Mountain House & District Community Learning Society
- Winnipeg Black History Month
- MT Space Theatre in Kitchener Waterloo
- Skirts Afire Festival

montreal gazette

Baby is about to be delivered into a loving Jamaican-Filipino-Ukrainian family
by Gaeton L. Charlebois

Confessionals, autobiographies and coming of age stories come and go at Fringe festivals. Often the ones which are remembered are marked by how awfully funny the lives described were, or how awfully awful they were. Very, very occasionally, a sweet, eccentric childhood can also make the grade, as a Fringe show, but that is a very rare thing.

Deep Fried Curried Perogies is such a sweet show and it makes the grade not for its sweetness but for its utterly unusual (and yet strangely familiar) territory. Edmontonian actor/writer Michelle Todd, you see, is of Jamaican/Filipino descent. The work, however, goes beyond that to her relationship with her white boyfriend of Ukrainian descent. The focus of the show is the baby she and the beloved are about to have and how it puts all these questions of multi-ethnicity into very sharp relief.

The approach is utterly scattershot - we go back and forth in time; we fly about among the many accents that surround the story; anecdotes zip in and out and some are performed; dances are danced in a frenzy of sweaty, unbounded joy; customs and food are described, various types of music heard. Ultimately, there are very few moments of respite for this unflagging and committed performer and you simply hop on and enjoy the ride.

If one were to get preachy, one would suggest it is time to get this show in front of a harsh director and have it sharpened so that beats are taken and pauses allowed to give weight to the truly important moments.

But that's the end of the sermon. See this.

georgia straight Critic's Choice Nominee

by Colin Thomas

Because Michelle Todd's dad is Jamaican and her mom is Filipino, her school chums in Edmonton nicknamed her Jalipino. Stories about multiculturalism can be as dully wholesome as bran, but this coming-of-age tale which Todd wrote and performs is so profoundly reassuring in its inclusiveness that I actually slept better for having seen it. Her characterizations are crisp: I loved seeing Todd as a little girl falling asleep watching hockey with her monumentally quiet dad. Her dancing is pure pleasure; just wait for all of the countries she conjures when describing Edmonton's Heritage Days. And her theatricality is sharp: a tight light illuminates a hand pointing at an atrocity. It's the spiritual peace that makes this show so calming, though. While acknowledging real pain and injustice, Todd is bearing witness to a happy Canadian life.

The edmonton sun

It's All Black & White
One-woman show a witty, poignant look at race, culture
5 Suns (out of 5) *****

by Mike Ross

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, schoolmates, family, the government - in short, everyone else - who feed 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.

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.

