



## Pones Inc. Offers Food for Thought

*Cincinnati's provocative performance art troupe*

*Pones Inc. adds food to its toolkit*

**MATT MORRIS** // JUL 27, 2010

Food and art have interesting commonalities in the way they are carefully prepared, the way they affect our senses and, perhaps most of all, the attention we pay to them when we find them strikingly beautiful. So it makes sense that artists can use food in their work to celebrate aspects of community, to comment on various cultures' rituals

for cooking and eating and also to observe problems of wastefulness and decay. What we eat can be gorgeous or it can be gross.

Because of the actions associated with cooking and eating, food lends itself to performance. This is just what the local performance art group Pones Inc. has done with its most recent work, *Rub, Dredge, Fry (Repeat)*, which premiered last weekend at Museum Gallery/Gallery Museum's The Deep Fried Freedom Festival, a one-night art event organized by artist and curator Loraine Wible.

Pones Inc. Laboratory of Movement was founded in 2008 by directors Lindsey Jones and Kim Popa, both graduates of NKU's theater program. It has been featured in the Cincinnati Fringe Festival for the past two years and has staged playful, experimental works in all kinds of art venues in the city. Its works are never simply modern dance; rather, they incorporate spoken word, acting and occasionally live music performances or interactive sequences that engage the audience directly.

Pones Inc. always searches for how these elements of performance might fit together to portray something meaningful. Another constant is the heart and soul that drives it. Nearly every piece I've seen by Pones has begun through workshops with the cast and directors, where the art is built upon personal experiences and autobiography. The final performances, no matter how abstract or avant garde, are personable and humanizing.

Its new performance piece, *Rub, Dredge, Fry (Repeat)*, looks deep into the kitchen. Last Saturday, this new work was presented both inside and outside Museum Gallery/Gallery Museum in Over-the-Rhine. The performance featured Darnell Benjamin, Jill Hacker, Kate Kershaw, Jones and Popa.

It began with Kershaw standing behind a table stocked with all the ingredients for a meal. Kershaw started into a monologue that was interspersed with a video projected over her and her cooking station. The video showed her learning her grandmother's recipe for fried chicken, which begins with skinning a whole chicken and transforming it from carcass into individual pieces of golden, crunchy meat. Kershaw recollected her childhood and her grandmother's cooking, before branching off into an oral history of the dish as it made its way from slavery times in the South up to Appalachia, where her great-grandparents and grandparents ate fried chicken daily.

Especially touching was when she recounted that her grandmother once apologized to her and her sister for making them so “healthy.” Kershaw explained (in a voice that sounded close to tears) that by “healthy,” she meant overweight. Her grandmother was from a time when being large reflected your family’s resources and material comfort.

Throughout her storytelling, Kershaw followed the family recipe, skinning and hacking up a chicken, dropping chunks of fat into a bucket beside the table. Each piece was dredged, spiced and fried. The sloppy sounds, the rich colors of viscera and the smell of the frying meat created a powerfully charged atmosphere.

The audience was then ushered outside onto the sidewalk where several of the other performers were stripped down to leotards or shorts. They distributed bags full of water, flour, an egg or spices to those gathered. They danced ritualistically, recalling some of the movements of chopping and dredging we had just seen. At intervals, they would call for a step in the recipe, at which time those with ingredients were invited to douse the performers in them, making *them* the meal being prepared. The smell on the sidewalk was potent with cayenne pepper and herbs. Flour footprints followed the dancers through the last bit of their choreography.

One left juggling thoughts about family traditions, providing for the hungry and the cyclical pattern we as humans, especially Americans, have with indulgent foods and poor body images. The entire evening attempted to overcome that. “Fat Studies” programs in grad schools around the country are already making the arguments that body image and health are not as obviously connected as forces like TV’s *The Biggest Loser* might have us believe.

With *Rub, Dredge, Fry (Repeat)* we were invited to celebrate our own culinary histories, indulgence and the beauty of traditions separated from America’s poor-body-image issues, at least for the one night. I heard one woman at the show say, “I’m deep-fried freedom, baby!” and it felt like mindsets were shifting on the spot. The next morning, when I made breakfast, I felt more aware of the steps in the recipe and the movements of beating an egg or flipping a pancake. Pones Inc.’s research always seems to lead to that borderline where dance is just another form of movement, like those that fill our daily lives.

Pones is currently preparing to tour its show *Four Food Groups*, starting at the Indianapolis Fringe Festival where it will run Aug. 20-29 at Comedy Sportz in Indianapolis.

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**<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13013915/pones-inc-offers-food-for-thought>**