

Deaf Crows Collective hosting a deaf dinner party to fund its next project

Usually, restaurant menus don't come with a Sign Language cheat sheet. And, usually, servers aren't deaf. This isn't your usual dinner party.



ASHLEY MARTIN, REGINA LEADER-POST

Regina Leader-Post

[More from Ashley Martin, Regina Leader-Post](http://leaderpost.com/author/lpashleyM) ([HTTP://LEADERPOST.COM/AUTHOR/LPASHLEYM](http://leaderpost.com/author/lpashleyM))

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Usually, restaurant menus don't come with an American Sign Language cheat sheet. And, usually, restaurant waiters aren't hard of hearing.

This isn't your usual dinner party.

On March 10, students from the Thom Collegiate deaf and hard of hearing program will be the servers at a fundraiser supper at the Blue Rooster Café in Pilot Butte.

Proceeds will support their artistic collective, Deaf Crows, in presenting its next artistic venture.

The students hope to provide a sneak peek of their new production, a circus-like play called Apple Time, during the dinner.

"I'm not sure if we can juggle in a restaurant, but we'll try," said teacher Joanne Weber.

During Friday afternoon's rehearsal, seven students took turns tossing batons and suitcases to one another.

The play's theme hearkens to a carnival, said Weber, where "you would have a beggar being crowned a king ... poor people become the rich people, just for that one evening or that one day before Lent would start."

"We're borrowing from that tradition of the carnival act," added Weber, "which is turning it upside down and saying, 'Deaf people are now in control, and we're inviting you into our space.'"



Deaf Crows Collective member Sable, left, Fatima Nafisa, centre right, and Mustafa Alabssi, right, practise juggling suitcases, as artist-in-residence Chrystene Ells, centre left, looks on

Presented in June 2016, the group's namesake Deaf Crows production (<http://leaderpost.com/entertainment/local-arts/regina-play-deaf-crows-hopes-to-bring-insight-to-a-hearing-world>) shared the deaf students' experience of oppression in mainstream society.

Their Deaf Forest art exhibition, displayed in October (<http://leaderpost.com/news/local-news/thom-students-view-hearing-world-through-a-different-lens-in-deaf-forest-art-exhibition>), built on that theme, through three different "forests": the "hearing forest," devoid of emotion and meaning; the "hard of hearing forest," with glimmers of understanding; and the "deaf forest," a vibrant place where communication is possible.

This new project, scheduled for June 2 and 3 at The Artesian, takes the theme a step further.

The name Apple Time was inspired by one student's art project. "Apple time" was her term for the "weird liminal space" the students experience, as neither part of the hearing world, nor the traditional Deaf community.

The students interpret "apple time" as a safe, empowering and respectful place that enables them to learn, said teacher Michelle Grodecki.

As with their previous two projects, artist-in-residence Chrystene Ells is aiding the students.

The dinner party fundraiser will cover production costs. Still in the planning stages, Weber said they've already spent \$150 on juggling equipment, with carpentry and travel expenses to come.

Nine of the program's 11 students are part of the production.

"Our numbers keep growing. ... We're still being invited to perform in other locations, so there's a whole big issue of money," said Weber.

The group travelled to Edmonton a year ago for the Sound Off festival, but couldn't afford to attend again this year.

The Deaf Dining Experience Night is Saturday, March 10, at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$60 and are available by calling the Blue Rooster Café at 306-337-4555 or at eventbrite.ca.

amartin@postmedia.com (<mailto:amartin@postmedia.com>)

twitter.com/LPAshleyM (<http://twitter.com/LPAshleyM>)

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