

Awful Purdies to tell Iowa farmers' stories in song

Paul Deaton 12:16 a.m. CDT October 17, 2014



(Photo: Special to the Press-Citizen)

SOLON – To say the Awful Purdies “All Recipes Are Home” project is a work in progress is literally the point.

Beginning last June, the eclectic group of five musicians took their “purdified” blend of modern folk music around Iowa to hear the stories of farmers and people who gather around food. The tour is part of fulfillment of a \$10,000 grant awarded by the Iowa Arts Council.

The tour, and its “story circles,” are intended to be source material for a new album and play to be released next year, both titled “All Recipes Are Home.” The final event in the grant series will be a concert and story circle at 6 p.m. Saturday at Salt Fork Kitchen in Solon.

What is a story circle?

“A story circle is a simple way to for a group of people to share personal stories,” said Katie Roche, who plays accordion, xylophone, penny whistle, recorder and washboard for the group. She also is the development director for The Englert Theatre and the professional grant writer who wrote the grant from the Iowa Arts

Council for the Awful Purdies.

“At past concerts we have taken chairs and placed them in a circle,” Roche said. “Marcy Rosenbaum, our mandolin player, has led a discussion with concert-goers helping to facilitate a discussion that will help them to share stories about farming, food memories of the kitchen, recipes and any ideas they might have for a song.”

The Purdies held previous concerts and story circles in Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, Tiffin and Decorah. The event at Salt Fork Kitchen is part of a work in progress and attendees can expect to hear songs drawn from previous story circles.

“We’ll definitely share one or two of the new songs,” said Roche in an email. “But most we are waiting to debut in the play ‘All Recipes Are Home,’ which will tour Iowa in April 2015.”

The play is to be written by Sean Christopher Lewis of Working Group Theatre of Iowa City. It is co-sponsored by Hancher Auditorium and Grinnell and Luther Colleges and will be performed at all three venues.

Salt Fork Kitchen will host the Saturday event.

“We’re just the venue,” said Liz Sanders, Salt Fork Kitchen general manger.

They are, but they aren’t. Salt Fork Kitchen grew out of Salt Fork Farms which has been active in a local food movement expected to inform Saturday’s story circle.

Salt Fork Farms was established by Eric Menzel in 2007 near Solon. They grow vegetables, fruit, herbs, flowers, and poultry for meat and eggs.

“We strive to provide the most wholesome, nutritious and delicious foodstuffs possible while maintaining a healthy relationship to the land and connecting others to the agrarianism that sustains them,” according to their website. Food served at the event is expected to include locally produced fare from the farm.

“(The Awful Purdies event is) a way for people to get together and think about what’s around them in terms of food and how it affects their health,” Menzel said.

He explained that setting the Awful Purdies event at Salt Fork Kitchen was the result of collaboration between Menzel and his friend, Shanti Sellz, who is a farmer near Hills.

“I hope that as the growing season wanes, this amazing community of hard-working farmers, chefs, food-workers, consumers, food activists and local food enthusiasts will pause from their work for a while and spend an evening together celebrating our local food system and dreaming of what we can do to make it better,” Sellz said in an email.

News of the event is beginning to circulate in the community.

"The event is a great way for the citizens of Johnson County to share their stories about locally raised fresh food," said Mike Carberry, and Iowa City resident, local food advocate and candidate for county supervisor. "A growing number of folks have turned to sustainably raised local food. Hopefully some will share the stories of the obstacles to growing local food in Johnson County, and others may share ideas on how to overcome those obstacles."

"Those of us in the local food movement sometimes struggle to be united," said Susan Jutz, who has been the farmer and operator of Local Harvest CSA near Solon for almost 20 years. "Maybe by bringing music to the table we won't have to rely so much on Joel Salatin and other big names to promote our cause. Maybe it will come out of Iowa."

The Awful Purdies concert and story circle is open to farmers, food workers, and communities that gather around food.

"A community that gathers around food might be a CSA, a food cooperative, a church basement full of moms working together for a bake sale," Roche said. "It's deliberately loosely defined to help people think about the ways in which they gather around food. My friends and I like to potluck."

That includes just about anyone.

If you go

• **What:** Awful Purdies performance and story circle as part of a \$10,000 grant awarded by the Iowa Arts Council. The tour, and its "story circles," are intended to be source material for a new album and play to be released next year, both titled "All Recipes Are Home."

• **When:** 6 p.m. Saturday.

• **Where:** Salt Fork Kitchen, 112 E. Main St. in Solon.

• **Cost:** Free. Salt Fork will offer a full cash bar and a special menu, along with à la carte/tapas-type items for less than \$10.

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