



Press Release: Insurgent Theatre presents

## **In the Belly**

For Immediate Release:

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Digital photos, interview and photo opportunities are available upon request.

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[RedBirdPrisonAbolition.org](http://RedBirdPrisonAbolition.org)

Photo by A Bagel Nelson.

# **In the Belly**

In the belly is where things digest, where they are broken down so their value can be extracted. This is where things are made to rot. If our society is a beast, it's belly is the prison system.

This new work from Insurgent Theatre seeks to manifest imprisonment on stage, overlays it with critical analysis of the system, and follows up with in-depth discussion about abolishing prison in America.

Created in workshop by **Weslie Coleman**, **Kate Pleuss**, and **Ben Turk**. With the assistance of Harmony Bench and Rebecca Riley.

Touring the US in 2011. Raising funds for RedBird Prison Abolition. Supporting prisoners in Ohio.

*In the Belly* contains nudity, violence and other sad realities of the US prison system.

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# ARTISTS' STATEMENT:

*In the Belly* is our initial exploration and imagined realities of the US prison system. We set out to drag this system into the light, and decided to start with our bodies and our imaginations, incorporating thoughts from those on the inside as we went. *In the Belly* juxtaposes disjointed overlapping scenes of inhumane isolation and torture with critical analysis of the US prison system.

We eschew conventional narrative first because no story can speak for all prisoners' experiences, and second, because we want to keep from dead-ending in catharsis. We aren't seeking sympathy for specific individuals in order to weed out bad apples in prison administration, or call for reform of the worst aspects of the system. We want to abolish it entirely, from solitary to minimum, from the death penalty to the cops parked down the block, from corporate privatization to judges and prosecutors. Everything must go.

It seems most Americans relate to prison as an unmentionable aspect of our society, something most people fear or regret, but few want to even imagine. *In the Belly* seeks to create a politicized space for dialog,

sharing of experiences and exploration of prison issues. The cast describes what prison abolition involves and then opens the floor for skepticism and counter-argument.

We built this play to be able to tour and also to evolve over time. After going on the road for over a year with two previous shows (*Ulysses' Crewmen* and *Paint the Town*) we're familiar with the technical limitations imposed by this versatility and have conceived and designed *In the Belly* to turn these limitations into advantages. Built for minimal set-up time, maximum adaptability and a heavy focus on discussion, *In the Belly* can be performed anywhere from basements to galleries to black boxes.

Audience feedback from these different spaces plays a role in how the show will evolve. We're most proud of the times we've successfully created a temporary space where former inmates can share their stories with less of the social stigma that weighs on the formerly incarcerated in our society. We've learned much in these instances, intend to learn more, and to develop and adapt the show to reflect these myriad experiences.

## CAST BIOGRAPHIES:



Weslie Coleman is a first time actor and is excited to use theatre as a way to not only explore issues in our society but also to start real dialog and discussion about them. She hopes that this show influences people to take similar agency over their lives and question the beliefs that enable a system based upon exploitation and consumption.



Kate Pleuss grew up with chickens in northern Wisconsin and now lives in an egalitarian community in Ohio. She performs in DIY (Do It Yourself) shows, first to create space for critical thinking and action specifically outside of the ivory towers, and second, to give her a chance to practice alternative economies that strive to be cooperative, non-hierarchical and actually satisfying. She has learned how to act in, promote and book shows herself with the help of other folks already working on DIY projects.



Ben Turk lives in an egalitarian Community. He is learning gardening, carpentry, and all sorts of home repair. He volunteers with the local books to prisoners and prison abolition groups in Columbus, OH. He's also been writing plays, building sets, producing and acting in theatre since 2003. He has studied theatre mostly independent of any academic institution and learned most of what he knows by creating shows from scratch with other independent artists.



# INSURGENT THEATRE

strives to connect performing arts with radical struggles, to make theatre that is relevant, engaging, challenging and useful for those who confront the US police state and global capitalist empire.

Insurgent Theatre has been producing original work since 2003, with no budgets, endowments, non-profit status, or other nonsense. They've been frequently touring the country since 2008. Insurgent is currently based in Columbus, OH.

# REDBIRD PRISON ABOLITION

is a group of people in Columbus, OH who want to see the prison system come to an end. The all-volunteer group has no budget, substantial funding or formal mission statement. RedBird's activities are guided by correspondence with incarcerated people because prison abolition ought to begin with the needs of those most directly effected by the system. Things they've done include: writing prison pen pals, connecting prisoners with needed resources, raising funds for legal defense, hosting events, publishing materials, and creating critical discussions about the US prison system.

## ALSO FROM INSURGENT THEATRE: ULYSSES' CREWMEN



From August of 2009 til November of 2010 Insurgent Theatre toured the country with Ulysses' Crewmen. Ben and Kate survived over 100 performances of this ultra-violent anti-globalization play in basements, bars, infoshops, outdoor spaces and even the occasional theatre. They also performed Ulysses' Crewmen during the G20 summit protests in Pittsburg and at the People's Summit (leading up to G20 summit) in Toronto.

**DESCRIPTION:** A militant dissenter abuses her hostage from the US delegation while faintly aware of the audience surrounding her. This claustrophobic scene creates a space for radical introspection, defiant theatre and tactical conversations. With only a few props, two actors, one of whom is bound and gagged, and a serious commitment to DIY politics, Insurgent Theatre refutes ancient dogmas found in Homer's Odyssey and examines the psychosexual underpinnings of empire and rebellion.

Praise for ULYSSES' CREWMEN:

"Strong stuff, strongly performed!"  
-John Schneider, formerly of Theatre X

"It takes guts to do work like this."  
-Kurt Hartwig, SnapMilwaukee.com

"Intensely destructive and aggressively beautiful... since the world has stopped listening to meek questions, this play screams." -Peter J Woods, FTAM, Milwaukee, WI

"One of the most inspiring DIY tours I have ever encountered. Its execution is intensely captivating and provocative. What other play features an hour of harsh interrogation and pistol-whipping followed by remarkably constructive conversation with its audience?"  
-Robert Inhuman, Realicide