



A cast member from the musical *Urinetown* (above) and Charles and Ruth Jones (right) performed after the biggest sit-down dinner party I've ever been to. (photos by Jill Clarey)



A very different sort of dinner party

By [Brian Clarey](#)

We gather in the long hallway three floors above South Elm Street, the main artery of a converted boardinghouse, its rooms now fashioned into the home of Charles and Ruth Jones.

Actors! There are maybe 50 of us, milling at the top of the stairs and threading through the rooms. There's wine and beer and soft drinks aplenty, and Charles will make sure you fill up before he takes you on a tour, a well-worn path through the rooms — each, he points out, with its own closet — with emphasis on the bathroom and the performance space.

A stage! A stage! The very mirror of human life! The john, with two shower stalls, a claw-foot bathtub and modern commode, provides clues to the building's previous life as the Craven Hotel. History! The performance space is all Charles and Ruth Jones.



They are actors in the exclamatory sense of the word — Actors! — with a shared background in touring theater that has brought them the world over but spared them little time to engage with their fellows.

That's how this whole thing started. They called it "Supper Club" when they started it in Tennessee, but since they've moved into their long row of rooms on Elm it's been rechristened "Greensboro Grub," and the Joneses try to hold it down once a month.

The premise is simple: Come to meet and eat, and afterwards share in an old-style evening of entertainment, salon-style, in the performance space.

Charlie's lined the hallway with dinner tables and 52 folding chairs. Tonight is soup night, and because he insists on doing all the cooking himself Charlie's been knocking around the tureens all day. A last-minute purchase ensured there would be enough soup bowls to go around.

"We have about six gallons of beef burgundy soup," Charlie's voice resonates in the hallway. There is also a Thai coconut-chicken soup, a chicken and asparagus soup and a vegetarian corn chowder.

It's a fine night for soup, though Charlie, who likes to show off in his kitchen, plays down the degree of difficulty. "Anyone can make soup," he wrote on his invitation.

But Charlie's soups are magnificent things. The beef burgundy is particularly memorable, subtly redolent of mushroom, tomato, onion and... is that sherry? 'Tis! The company was wonderful as well... a motley collection of artists, business owners, teachers, writers, musicians, performers... breaking bread and

telling tales.

And while we eat, Charles, a man of infinite jest, selects a few diners for an impromptu interview. Tonight we get to know a teacher from China, a stockbroker-turned-professor and a business owner who hails from the Northeast just a little bit better.

And then, when the meal is done, we repair to the salon — A stage! Where every man (and woman) must play his part! Stuffed bookshelves line the room, with a bust of the Bard surveying the scene from on high, and guests are enticed to share their talents. There is a rendition of “Ode To a Red-Assed Monkey,” a song from *Urinetown: The Musical*, haunting violin and freestyle spoken word, as well as one of the finest renditions of “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” this reporter has ever heard. There is a painter, a singer of novelty songs, and the freaky chicks from Elsewhere constructing poetry by lifting random sentences from two disparate textbooks from the 1950s.

Brilliant! And in between, Charlie and Ruth Jones do their thing with the comedic timing of George and Gracie, the chemistry of Bogey and Bacall, the adorability of Hanks and Ryan. Genuises, all! And while we’re still basking in the afterglow, Charlie addresses the room: “Thank you so much for coming,” he says. “Now get the hell out of my house.”

To comment on this story e-mail Brian Clarey at editor@yesweekly.com.