*Acting Edition*

# CHICKEN

by Eva O'Connor and
Hildegard Ryan



SAMUEL FRENCH

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# SUNDAY'S CHILD

**Sunday's Child** is an award-winning Irish theatre company run by Eva O'Connor and Hildegard Ryan. We aim to make vibrant, contemporary work about issues that are often swept under the carpet. Our plays have toured Ireland, the UK, Australia, USA and mainland Europe. They include *My Name is Saoirse* (Winner of First Fortnight Award 2014, Argus Angel Award 2015, and Adelaide Best Theatre Award 2017) *Overshadowed* (Winner of Fishamble Award for Best New Writing 2015, and adapted for screen for BBC Three) *Afloat*, *The Friday Night Effect*, *MUSTARD* (co-produced with Fishamble The New Play Company, winner of Scotsman Fringe First 2019, Critics Circle Award Adelaide Fringe 2023 and adapted for screen for RTE Storyland) and most recently *Chicken*. Sunday's Child runs FUTURE LIMERICK: Climate Arts Festival in conjunction with the Lime Tree | Belltable in Limerick, Ireland.

*Chicken* premiered in Summerhall at the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2023, where it enjoyed a sellout run. It won the Filipa Bragança Award for best solo female/non-binary identifying performer and the Lustrum Award 2023. The performance was directed by Hildegard Ryan, with costume design by Bryony Rumble and lighting design by Marianne Nightingale. The cast was as follows:

**DON THE CHICKEN**. . . . . Eva O'Connor

The 2024 tour of *Chicken* was produced by Sunday's Child, and opened at the Traverse Theatre on 18th April.

# CAST & CREATIVE

## DON THE CHICKEN/CO-WRITER | EVA O'CONNOR

Eva O'Connor is an award-winning writer/performer from Ogonnelloe, County Clare, Ireland. She makes work for stage, screen and radio, and is co-artistic director of Sunday's Child alongside Hildegard Ryan. Eva is the writer of several published, award-winning plays. Her credits include *Overshadowed* (now a series on BBC Three), *MUSTARD* (Winner of Scotsman Fringe First 2019 and Critics Circle Award Adelaide Fringe 2023 and adapted for television for RTE Storyland), *HORSE PLAY* (produced by Glass Mask Theatre), *My Name is Saoirse*, *Maxwell House* (Dear Ireland for the Abbey Theatre), *Maz and Bricks* (produced by Fishamble the New Play Company), *Afloat* (co-written with Hildegard Ryan), and *The Friday Night Effect* (co-written with Hildegard Ryan). Eva won the Filipa Bragança Award for best solo female/non-binary identifying performer at the Edinburgh Fringe 2023 for *Chicken*. Recently she wrote on *Taigh Tŷ Teach*, a tri-lingual co-production with Fishamble: The New Play Company. She is also co-curator of FUTURE LIMERICK: Climate Arts Festival with Hildegard Ryan and Sophie Fuller. Eva runs *What's The Story*, a quarterly night of new writing at the London Irish Centre.

## DIRECTOR/CO-WRITER | HILDEGARD RYAN

Hildegard is an award-winning writer/director with credits in stage and screen from Skerries, County Dublin, Ireland. Hildegard is co-artistic director of Sunday's Child with Eva O'Connor. Hildegard co-wrote and directed the interactive play *The Friday Night Effect* and *Afloat*. Her directing credits include plays *My Name is Saoirse*, *Overshadowed* (adapted for BBC Three, co-written with Eva O'Connor), *Afloat*, *MUSTARD* (Winner of Scotsman Fringe First, Critics Circle Award Adelaide Fringe) and *Frigid* by Rosa Bowden (Winner of the Bewleys Little Gem Award). Hildegard has also directed extensively for TV including *MUSTARD* for RTE Storyland, *Casualty*, *The Dumping Ground*, *Still So Awkward* for Channel X/CBBC and she co-directed two episodes of *Dodger* for CBBC/NBC which won in the Children's Programme category at the RTS Awards 2023. She is also co-curator of FUTURE LIMERICK: Climate Arts festival with Eva O'Connor and Sophie Fuller.

## LIGHTING DESIGNER | MARIANNE NIGHTINGALE

Marianne "Maz" Nightingale is a lighting technician and lighting designer from South East England. Throughout her professional career she has worked as part of the lighting department in many London producing theatres such as the Royal Court, the Young Vic, the Bridge Theatre, the National and annually at the Edinburgh Fringe. It was her passion for new writing which led her to working with Sunday's Child. Marianne has been designing and touring with the company for almost ten years, working on a multitude of their award-winning productions: *My Name is Saoirse*, *The Friday Night Effect*, *Afloat* and *MUSTARD*. "*Chicken* has been a fantastic piece to work on. It's been a pleasure lighting this show and of course shining a spotlight on Don the chicken!"

## COSTUME DESIGNER | BRYONY RUMBLE

Bryony is a sculptural artist working mainly with fabrics, leathers, foams and forms. She is a props, costume props/creature fabricator for film, TV, opera, theatre and events. She studied Fine Art at Norwich School of Art and Design and then trained as a Cordwainer at The London College of Fashion, before finding a love for character design, puppets, masks and sculptural costumes through a more technical performing arts course, also at LCF. Bryony is interested in texture and form, manipulation of fabric and new silhouettes. She is a lover of things, and inspired by colour and clashing patterns, gaudy and kitsch, odd and macabre, grotesque and revolting and all that lies in between. Credits include: Igor Studios, KMFX, Warner Brothers, Millennium FX, Punchdrunk, Disney Theatrical, Significant Object, RSC, Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne, ENO, National Theatre, Shakespeare's Globe, Adam Spiegel and Kenny Wax Ltd.

## CHARACTERS

**DON THE CHICKEN**

## AUTHORS' NOTE

We initially wrote *Chicken* as a vegan call to arms. We thought that if we could get an audience to fall in love with a chicken, perhaps they'd think differently about their next meal. Writing a one-chicken show about a ketamine addicted actor cock always felt like a creative risk. There was a definite moment of "what have we done?" in the seconds before Eva stepped out on stage for the first time in the giant chicken costume in Summerhall in Edinburgh 2023. We were bowled over by the response to our wacky, troubled chicken friend. Don took on a life of his own and *Chicken* became a play about otherness, emancipation, rebellion and belonging.

*Ní saoirse go saoirse na sicíní.*
There can be no freedom until the chickens have freedom.

*Classical music plays. Enter* **DON** *the chicken. He pecks around, looking inquisitive and a bit anxious. He pecks the ground, pecks the audience and occasionally looks up, startled. He keeps pecking for a good two minutes.*

Ahhh I'm only messing.

I'm only winding ye up.

**DON** *pecks at a random man in the audience.*

Look at this lad here

and the fear in his eyes.

He thought it was gonna be

one full hour of

peck-peck-peck performance art.

No, I wouldn't do that to you.

My levels of celebrity self-delusion

are not quite there yet.

I'm no high falootin' conceptual artist.

I'm a simple storyteller

like the bards of yore.

I am a humble actore.

Hello my friends.

Thank you for coming!

Or rather…

you're welcome.

What a privilege for all of you
to join me here in my chambers.
Cosy,
claustrophobic,
almost like…chickens,
in a coop.

I know why you're here.
Couldn't resist a glimpse of me
in the pimply flesh.
The feathered dynamo,
the tabloid prince,
Don Murphy.
Godfather to Michael Fassbender's three children.
Once bedfellow to Martin Scorsese – don't ask.
Celebrant at Pamela Anderson's ninth wedding.
A lowly bird from the Irish back of beyond,
now the world's most famous cock.

Perhaps you're here
out of some strange,
carnivorous compulsion
to consume me.
Not with your mouths
but with your eyes.

Or perhaps you were dragged in here
against your will.

Entrapped,
ensnared,
in a cruel twist of fate.

Regardless of your reasons
I'm thrilled to have you all here
with me tonight.
After years of guarding my privacy
with my short chicken life,
the time has come
to share my story.

Why now? I hear you ask.
Well, simply put – death.
I know it sounds morbid,
but the end is nigh.
You may think that we are different,
you and I,
my feathered friends,
but death is coming for all of us.
In fact, it is very literally
just around the corner.

Where to begin.
Born in the south of Ireland,
a Kerry cock through and through.
Hup the kingdom!

I hail from Caherdaniel,
home of Daniel O'Connell,
the great liberator
after whom I am named.
He fought for the rights
of peasant Irish Catholics
way back when.
He was an Irish freedom fighter
much like myself.

I was born a free-range chick
on a windswept Kerry sand dune.
Egg cracked open
under the crunch of human foot.
Shell split down the middle
like a fault line
by none other than
my future surrogate mother
Máire Murphy.

There I am staring up at her,
my neck nearly broken,
the son she never had.
But of course poor Máire
is riddled with the guilt
of having stepped on me
in her sensible Clarks shoes
and her terrible '90s perm.

She takes me home
to nurse me back to full health.
I am so tender in those early days
that her husband Declan
wants to whisk me into an omelette.
But Máire is having none of it.
She takes me under her wing,
gets an actual prosthetic wing made,
God bless her.

As a young chick,
I beg Máire to take me back
to the sand dune of my birth.
To the scene of the shell squashing crime.
But Máire is wounded,
thinks I'm longing for my chicken mother
and so we avoid that beach
like the plague.

It's not long 'til Declan too
takes a shine to me.
He kits me out in the Kerry colours,
determined that I too will play a bit of GAA
like the other boys.
But the sight of a Gaelic football
coming towards me
strikes fear into my veins
and I freeze

as the lad I'm meant to be marking
boots the ball clean over the bar.

*Useless Chicken shit!*
Cries the crowd from the stand.
Declan rushes onto the pitch,
whisks me to the sideline,
perches me on his knee,
and clucks,
*You are named after Daniel O'Connell*
*the great liberator.*
*You are not a chicken,*
*you are a proud Irish man*
*and my son.*

My first foray into performance
comes when I am cast as Jesus
in the nativity play.
Now I'm sure they're thinking
the rooster's not up to much.
Let's stick him in the manger,
fling a tea towel on top of him
and he'll probably sleep through most of it.
But I give everything to the role.
The crowd are awed.
When they look upon the manger,
they see not a chicken

but the actual Christ child.
I suppose you could say
that discovering Jesus
changed my life.

Soon after feathers are ruffled
when I announce that I'm flying the nest.
Headed to New York City
in search of my big bird break.
Máire weeps,
*Oh God Don,*
*I can't bear to think of you all alone*
*over there in the big smoke.*
Declan is stoic.
Emigration has been the fate
of many an Irish man.
Why should his son be any different?
*Well lad, not a hope in hell*
*you'll make it as an actor over there*
*but sure, God loves a trier.*

Those early days in New York City are tough.
I'm living claw to beak,
not a scrap of fat on my breasts,
sleeping rough on window ledges.
It is then that Paulo the pigeon
pecks his way into my life.

A Glaswegian bird
with an unhealthy obsession
with Celtic football club
and bread.
Paulo takes me bin diving
outside the city's finest bakeries.
He plunges beak first
into trash cans that smell
like rotting corpse,
emerges victorious
with still warm loaves of brioche,
bagels soft as snow.
We perch on the nearest bench
and chow down
until we have heart palpitations.
I confide in Paulo.
I share my deepest fears and insecurities.
I tell him about my refusal to fly
for fear of revealing
my most chickenish traits.
My desperation to make it as an actor
in the big smoke.
Paulo locks eyes with me,
his mouth full with day old poppadom.
*In 1967 Celtic won five trophies.*
*Five!*

*Is that no inspiring?*
*Let that be a lesson to you my wee pal.*
*Anything's possible,*
*anything!*

Soon after I find an agent
in the Yellow Pages
and present myself at his office
in Washington Heights.
He's a small man in a wife beater
with more hair on his arms
than I have feathers on my wings.
*Books are closed!*
he barks, without even looking up
from his newspaper.
But I have heard it
on the grapevine
that he has a weakness
for a bit of bird.
And although I am young and scrawny,
I scrub up well.
I am aware even then
of the intoxicating allure of my plume.
When the agent finally clocks me
his eyes flare with desire.
*Well, well, well…*
*I feel like chicken tonight!*

My stomach churns
at his slur.
*Can you squawk baby bird?*
*Come sit on my knee,*
*and show daddy how you squawk.*

I would love to tell you
that I hold my rooster head high
and peck my way right out of there.
But I am young,
I am desperate.
And so I flit.
I flutter.
I perch on his knee
and against my better judgement,
I squawk for him.
*Ka kawwww!*

Máire is a great believer
in guardian angels.
She says that the lord
stations them on earth
in places you would least expect.
And I certainly didn't think
that mine would come to me
in the form of a naked Michael Fassbender
on a film set.

My hairy armed agent
has landed me a role
in Fassbender's latest feature.
Now my part is minuscule.
It's a fly-by.
Literally.
I'm an extra in a scene where Michael
runs naked through a chicken coop
letting it all hang loose.
*Very on brand for Fassbender*, says you.
They've wrangled myself
and two other amateur birds
for the scene.
A pair of hens from upstate New York.
Our instructions are very simple:
*As soon as you clap eyes on his pecker,*
*run like the wind!*
But the hens are nervous.
I say
*Listen girls,*
*the director already thinks*
*we're a bunch of bird brains.*
*Let's prove him wrong.*
But my pep talk
only makes them overthink.

As soon as they hear
the snap of the scene board
they freeze,
hens in the headlights.
The director is furious.
Cuts them from the scene.
So it's just myself and Fassbender
going for a take.
*And action!*
In he comes,
big swinging micky.
And on cue I scatter and run like bejaysus.

**DON** *runs around squawking.*

But not before I slip a quick glance to camera.
A smize.
An imperceptible wink.
*That chicken's really got something*
says the director watching the rushes.
Fassbender too is impressed.
*Nice work lil fella,* he says.
*Not so bad yourself Micheál!* I say,
clapping him on the back
with a sweaty wing.
*Wait,* he says.
*You're Irish?*

*Oh, I am begorah.*
*A fellow Kerry cock!*
Fassbender waves me into his trailer,
pours me a hefty glass of Jameson.
*If you don't mind me asking, lil fella,*
*what exactly is the craic with you?*
*Are you a hen or a chicken?*
*Cockerel or a rooster?*

Now listen my feathered friends,
I'm well used to this line of questioning.
People,
all of them,
are perverts.
Always mad to get the details
on the genitalia.

I say
*Listen Michael*
*I am much more than a meagre bird,*
*I am a humble actor, much like yourself.*
*I am a proud Irish man,*
*I am Declan's son*
*and most of all…*
*I'm anything you want me to be.*

**DON** *winks at him.*

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