

# WHO ARE YOU *really?*



Musician and actor  
**Declan Duffy** talks  
to **Fergus Byrne** about a new  
show exploring the dichotomy  
of the life of a migrant's child

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When you are born and raised in one country but have blood ties with another, how do you define, or even find, your true identity? That's a question that locally based musician and actor Declan Duffy has been wrangling with for some time. Born and raised in London, with the accent and much of the character that a London upbringing might present, his parents came from County Cavan in Ireland, which meant he had strong connections to a culture and country that has, to say the least, a 'complicated' history with the UK.

That history, and the inevitable family ties that build with a dual upbringing, forms the basis of a new one-man show that Declan is premiering at The Marine Theatre in Lyme Regis in November. Exploring a conundrum that could impact people of various nationalities, *Call Yourself an Irishman?!?* has the potential to educate, amuse, and enlighten its English audiences, whilst at the same time offer a comforting touch of sympathy and empathy to those who have faced similar dilemmas.

'The dichotomy of the migrant's child' declares Declan in the trailer for the show. 'I am not one, I am both. But yet, I am not either one.' The contrariety—to use a term popular in Ireland—doesn't just come from his own soul searching, the title *Call Yourself an Irishman?!?* is an established comment often thrown accusingly at Irish diaspora all over the world, especially if they are living in or embracing another culture. The title, Declan explains 'is kind of directed at myself and mostly comes from my cousins in Ireland who take active glee in telling me and my sister that we're English.'

But Declan isn't English, is he? He doesn't have an ounce of English blood running through his veins. However, he was born in England, went to an English school, became obsessed with and played English football and English music as a youth, and sounds about as English as you can get. So, what should he call himself? The dichotomy of the migrant's child indeed. All will be explained in the show.

*Call Yourself an Irishman?!?* will be considering the history of Irish migration to Britain, the difficulties encountered by the people who made that journey, and how all of this has influenced their descendants in their understanding of who they are and what they are.

Living above the pub that his parents ran in London, Declan initially dreamed of becoming a professional footballer. He was always in the first team in school or university and even had a trial for Brentford United. But he admits that, although a good player, he would probably never have made the level that professional players need to be at today. Instead, he followed his

other love which was music. After a time spent in the London music scene, where, as he recalls: 'My nascent career as London's next great Rock and Roll star hadn't progressed to the degree that I was hoping', he was drawn back to Bridport where his then girlfriend, now wife, came from.

They had met at the University of Southampton while studying languages; he was focused on French and English, while she studied French, English, and German. Ironically, considering the subject of his upcoming show, Declan describes himself as 'a real Francophile' and says he would happily live in the South of France. But this simply reinforces one of the fringe benefits of being a migrant. Not only are you offered the potential to naturally embark on a fascinating pathway of learning about different cultures because you are caught up in one, but you are also likely to be open enough to enjoy learning about others. His study of English also left him with a great love of Dickens. 'I love the richness of really well written prose' he says.

A chance suggestion that he might suit the role of Peter in Willy Russell's play *Stags & Hens* set him off on a trail of acting in plays for Encore Theatre in Bridport and community plays in Lyme Regis until one day someone suggested he write a show himself. 'I immediately dismissed the idea' he says. 'Because I had never done anything like that before'. But the idea solidified, and he began writing about life in Irish pubs in London until the result broadened a little more than intended. 'It broadened right out to every aspect of Anglo-Irish history you could possibly imagine' he laughs. 'And the Irish coming here, the Irish going to America, the Irish going across the world, our summer holidays in Ireland, the whole thing, and it got up to a hundred pages. I kind of realized that that really would be an undertaking, so narrowed it down. It's about twenty pages now, and it's become more of a specific exploration of why the Irish left, why they came here, and then the ramifications for us who were born here.'

In a multicultural society, a play like *Call Yourself an Irishman?!?* has the potential to both ask and answer many questions, while hopefully clearing some of the many misconceptions of life as an Irish migrant. However, it also offers the possibility that it might go well beyond dilemmas faced by residents in the British Isles. Its wider appeal has relevance to many nations and cultures.

*Call Yourself an Irishman?!?* premieres at The Marine Theatre in Lyme Regis on November 27th. To find out more or watch a trailer visit: <https://generationirish.net/>. To book tickets visit: <https://www.marinetheatre.com/>