

Comic Ardal O'Hanlon to Star at Moscow's Irish Week

By [Kevin O'Flynn](#)

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Irish comedian Ardal O'Hanlon, famed for his role as a dim-witted Catholic priest in the hit sitcom "Father Ted," is making his first visit to Moscow this weekend to perform at the city's annual Irish Week.

Best known for starring as the loveable but less than smart Father Dougal in "Father Ted," the 1990s show about three priests exiled to a remote island off the west coast of Ireland, O'Hanlon said in a phone interview from Ireland that he was looking forward to the one-off gig Sunday.

"I'm tremendously excited. It's a place I've always wanted to go for a number of reasons," said O'Hanlon, who said that gigs for foreign audiences are always a bit different. "You need to concentrate your mind a bit, really look at your own stuff and make sure it is all very relatable. For me, quite well known in Ireland and the U.K., it is also great to go to places where people don't really know much about you, so they don't really have any prejudice or great expectation — I hope."

O'Hanlon said he had prepared for the Moscow show by reading about Russia and watching the Oscar-nominated film "Leviathan," but added that the show would not differ greatly from his regular routine, except that he would slow it down, at least to begin with.

"But you know, we live in a global village and I suppose the material that I do is the most relatable, universal material. You know: fathers, mothers, wives, children, religion, sex — things everyone can identify with, no matter where you live," he said.

Irish Week has brought over some of the best Irish comedians in the last few years including Dylan Moran, best known in Russia as the louche bookshop owner in "Black Books," Dara O'Briain and David O'Doherty. In 2013, Russian comedians told some acts to stay away from sensitive topics like World War II.

Johnny O'Reilly, the long-time organizer of Irish Week, says as he does every year that he hopes they don't pull any punches.

"I think the comedians should address the political situation," said O'Reilly. "There is certainly a lot of censorship in the mainstream press [and] there's not a local comedy scene where comedians can be satirical about the current situation."

O'Hanlon has been a popular standup comic in Ireland and the U.K. for decades. He began in the 1980s in Dublin where he and his friends created the first comedy scene there out of nothing. He is not known as a political comedian, but he was going on stage then in a very different time.

"1980s Ireland was quite a conservative society [where there was a] worry about what to say and what not to say," he said.

"Religion was particularly really ripe for satire," he said. It was his irreverent act that helped him get the role in "Father Ted."

That show poked fun mercilessly at the Catholic Church and its priests and proved to be a big hit on Irish and British TV.

"People were absolutely ready for it. Even my parents' generation, who were very observant, they could see the merit in a show like that," he said.

It's hard to imagine Russian television doing a similar program about the Orthodox Church in today's more conservative political climate.

"There are certain similarities between Irish and Russians. Russians don't see it that way but Irish can see it," said O'Hanlon. "The materialism over the last 20 years — that is something we have in Ireland. People became rampant materialists over the last 20 years."

"I don't plan to do anything outrageously controversial in terms of content. I grew up as a Catholic in a very strict Catholic household and so I imagine it is not unlike an Orthodox household," he said. "It would be wrong not to do that [religious] stuff, it is interesting stuff that the audience would relate to."

"I'm not going to discuss Crimea in any great detail. I wasn't planning to," said O'Hanlon.

Ardal O'Hanlon plays Sunday. 8 p.m. Dom Kino. 13 Vasilyevskaya ulitsa. Metro. Belorusskaya, Mayakovskaya.

Paige Reynolds contributed to this report.

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