

CMT Presents

# CHICKEN PEOPLE

Directed by Nicole Lucas Haimes



**Press contact:**

Sunshine Sachs  
O: 212.691.2800

Tiffany Malloy  
[malloy@sunshinesachs.com](mailto:malloy@sunshinesachs.com)  
C: 201.925.1122

**CMT:**

Cindy Finke  
O: 615.477.8711

Cindy Finke  
[cindy.finke@cmt.com](mailto:cindy.finke@cmt.com)  
C: 615.477.8711

### **SHORT SYNOPSIS:**

Chicken may be just food for most people, but raising the perfect chicken is an all-consuming passion for some. CMT is teaming up with Emmy Award-winning Motto Pictures, also this year's Sundance Grand Jury Prize (U.S. Documentary) Winner for "Weiner", and Emmy nominated director Nicole Lucas Haines for "Chicken People," a two-hour documentary that takes a charming and fascinating look at the colorful and hugely competitive world of champion show chicken breeders. A real life "Best in Show" but about chickens, the film follows the struggles and triumphs of both humans and their chickens on the road to compete at the Ohio National Poultry Show, considered the Westminster of Chickens. "Chicken People" is produced by Motto Pictures and Haines Film, with Julie Goldman, Caroline Kaplan, Chris Clements, and Terry Leonard producing. Nicole Lucas Haines executive produces and Jayson Dinsmore, Lewis Bogach and John Miller-Monzon executive produce for CMT. "Chicken People" will premiere on CMT later this year.

### **SYNOPSIS**

Chicken may be just food for most people, but raising the perfect show chicken is an all-consuming passion for some. CMT is teaming up with Emmy Award-winning Motto Pictures, also this year's Sundance Grand Jury Prize (U.S. Documentary) Winner for "Weiner", and Emmy nominated director Nicole Lucas Haines for "Chicken People," a feature length documentary that follows the trials and tribulations, hopes and fears of those who breed poultry for competition on the high stakes national chicken show circuit. In the tradition of "Spellbound", "Chicken People" is a delightfully poignant feature documentary about the fascinating world of competitive chickens and the people who love them.

In a world where a bent feather can mean a broken dream, "Chicken People" begins at the Ohio National Poultry Show where each November, exotic poultry breeders from across America come to Columbus, Ohio with the goal of winning the title of Grand Champion. Considered the Westminster of chickens, the OPNS features 10,000 chickens in competition and among them are the film's three main characters – Brian Knox, a successful engineer of high performance race engines from New Hampshire; Shari McCollough, a homemaker and mother of five from Crawford, Indiana and Brian Caraker, a musical theater star from Branson, Missouri.

Over the course of a year, "Chicken People" follows these competitors in their shared, all consuming passion to raise the perfect chicken. The film tracks their progress – as contestants and in the challenges in their lives – richly illustrating the deep character and charming nature of their passion for poultry. The film explores how their daily lives intersect with their flocks of birds and how they change and grow as people due to their passion for their chickens. Along the journey, Brian K, Brian C and Shari struggle to overcome life's obstacles and together face a

nationwide outbreak of the Avian Flu that results in the unprecedented shutdown of the OPNS for the season.

Chicken People are a growing segment of our population. These are people who love and care for their chickens – some that even dress their chickens in diapers and treat their chickens like a part of the family. The result is a feathered, deeply sincere, heartfelt and uplifting BEST IN SHOW that highlights the joys of raising animals. “Chicken People” will premiere on CMT later this year.

### **Director Statement**

I began Chicken People five years ago while my 11 year-old son Lucas attended elementary school. For a short period of time, the boys in his class went crazy for chickens – which I found odd given the urban nature of Los Angeles.

Mystified by Lucas and his friends chanting, “chicken chicken chicken” followed by uproarious laughter, I nonetheless gifted him a book of chicken portraits. As we thumbed through the book, we noted the exquisite feather patterns and how the chickens resembled a stack of fluffy snowballs or wildly ornamental hats, I spotted a brief mention that people compete these birds. Like the Westminster dog show, but for chickens.

That was it! I knew I had to make a film. There is indeed something inherently funny about chickens, and people breeding and showing chickens seemed even funnier. Shortly thereafter I filmed a chicken competition, created a presentation reel, and began the arduous process of trying to finance a light-hearted documentary in an era of social issue filmmaking.

I continued to follow the different chicken shows and I wound up falling in love with the world of competitive poultry. Over time, my preconceived notions about the competitors changed.

Yes, people who diaper their chickens and keep them in the house are humorous, but I discovered generous and genuine people who are absolutely passionate about their show birds.

This human-chicken relationship, this human-chicken love, propel many of the folks I met to become the best version of themselves. And it was *this* emergent and unexpected narrative of triumph that became the story I knew I had to tell.

After optioning the idea to several production companies, and going through three rounds of casting, I eventually found a home for CHICKEN PEOPLE at CMT Docs. John Miller-Monzon and

Lewis Bogach immediately grasped what I wanted to achieve – both the humor and the heart-- and they connected me with Julie Goldman and Chris Clements of Motto Pictures who along with Caroline Kaplan and Terry Leonard became great producing partners.

One of my favorite aspects of this world is just how interesting and smart chickens really are. One hen, Peggy, is a really good sneak. Peggy, whose name is derived from the lost part of her leg and hence had a peg leg, managed to move her eggs and hide them one by one behind a tractor in her owners' barn, until one day, she surprised everyone by proudly emerging with a brood of 12 chicks.

I have witnessed chickens navigating obstacle courses, learning to count and recognizing shapes.

On another occasion, I watched a white rock hen lay an egg. As she began to work it from her body, which I learned is a relatively long process, the rooster stood over her protectively the entire time, making bold rooster cackles, until finally, out popped a blue egg. The mother hen seemed relieved and proud, and the rooster then felt free to go about his business. In a very basic way, it shows the connection all animals have with each other.

### **Challenges in making this documentary**

A: I wanted the film to be funny but never to poke fun, while in a heartfelt way follow the emotional journey of our cast.

Four months into the shoot, the Avian Flu epidemic forced the closure of our climatic chicken show which is hailed as the Westminster of all chicken shows. Disaster! The planned ending to the film was lost. Our team reached out to our vast network of competitors and ultimately found another venue available, though the show was a month later than our original competition, which meant losing a month of edit time. However, the film's two talented editors, Sara Booth and Kevin Klauber, met the challenge of establishing the right tone of the film with both the humor and emotional impact I aimed for under these new time constraints. Many all-nighters were needed to get the film done in time for the premiere.

### **What is your hope in terms of what the audience learns from the film**

I hope audiences come to understand that a person's commitment to her passion – no matter how kooky it may seem - has the power to transform lives in surprising and inspiring ways.

I hope audiences come to understand that a person's commitment to her passion – no matter how kooky it may seem - has the power to transform lives in surprising and inspiring ways. How about: I hope audiences come to understand that commitment to one's passion, no matter how offbeat, has the power to transform lives in surprising and inspiring ways.

### **PRODUCTION CREDITS**

#### Production

(Documentary) CMT FILMS Presents A MOTTO PICTURES Production In Association With HAIMES FILM and STRONGMAN FILMS.

Produced by Terry Leonard, Caroline Kaplan, Christopher Clements, Julie Goldman; Executive Producers Jayson Dinsmore, Lewis Bogach, John Miller-Monzon, Nicole Lucas Haimes; Co-Producers Carolyn Hepburn and Diane Becker. Associate Producers Marissa Ericson, Michael Steiner.

#### Crew

Directed by Nicole Lucas Haimes, Camera Martina Radwan; Co-Producer Diane Becker; Editors Kevin Klauber, A.C.E, Sara Booth; Post Production Supervisor J.E. Moore; Composer Michael Hearst; Music Supervisor Rob Lowry.

#### With

Brian Caraker, Brian Knox, Shari McCollough

### **NICOLE LUCAS HAIMES - DIRECTOR**

NICOLE LUCAS HAIMES is an Emmy nominated documentary filmmaker, television producer, writer and director.

Nicole has written, produced and/or directed for ABC News, CBS, PBS, FOX, A&E and Universal Television covering an array of subjects from a celebration of Alfred Hitchcock to cutting-edge genetic science to repeat sex offenders, mass murderers and police corruption.

Nicole most recently directed and produced "Chicken People," a light hearted feature documentary about the people who breed and compete exotic poultry with Motto Pictures

producing for CMT. She co-executive produced and wrote a documentary pilot for BET focusing on the LAPD Rampart scandal.

For A&E, Nicole co-executive produced, "Confessions of the DC Sniper" with William Shatner, securing a world-wide exclusive interview with Lee Boyd Malvo. *The Washington Post* called the broadcast "compelling," and "a well-crafted unspooling of Malvo's psychological journey from brainwashed sniper to regretful adult."

Prior to this, Nicole senior produced the BIO television series, "Aftermath With William Shatner." She received an Emmy nomination for her PBS documentary, "Cracking The Code."

Nicole began her career at ABC News, and produced at ABC's Burning Questions and Turning Point. She loves documentary filmmaking and visual storytelling.

### **ADDITIONAL BIOS**

#### **TERRY LEONARD - PRODUCER**

Recently, he premiered MOJAVE, which was written and directed by Academy Award winner William Monahan. Other film highlights include HOUNDDOG, COLD COMES THE NIGHT, HOW TO BE A MAN, BEFORE I DISAPPEAR, THE FORGOTTEN KINGDOM, MATCH, STEPHANIE DALEY, VIRGIN and AMIRA & SAM. When Leonard is not working on features, he produces commercials with his production company Strongman.

#### **CAROLINE KAPLAN - PRODUCER**

Caroline Kaplan is an award-winning, independent producer based in New York. Recent films include the upcoming **Time out of Mind**, written and directed by Oren Moverman starring Richard Gere and the upcoming **Oppenheimer Strategies**, written and directed by Joseph Cedar starring Richard Gere and Steve Buscemi currently in Post Production and **Letters to Juliet**, directed by Gary Winick and starring Amanda Seyfried and Vanessa Redgrave, for Summit Entertainment.

Prior to that she was the head of Production and Acquisitions at IFC Entertainment. She was also a founding partner of InDigEnt, the pioneering digital production company. Her film credits at IFC include: **Boys Don't Cry, Our Song, Spring Forward, Mr. Death, Waking Life, Monsoon**

**Wedding, Tadpole, Pieces of April, Personal Velocity, Casa de los Babys, Ballad of Jack and Rose, and Me and You and Everyone We Know.**

Prior to IFC Entertainment, she was the Senior Vice President of Original Programming for the Independent Film Channel and the Bravo Channel as well as a founder of the Independent Film Channel. Her television credits include: **Errol Morris' First Person, Inside the Actors Studio, A Decade Under the Influence, Dinner for Five, Blue Note: A Story of Modern Jazz, A Brief History of Errol Morris** and **Werner Herzog's My Best Fiend.**

Her films and television programs have garnered Oscars, Emmys, Peabodys and other awards. She began her career in the documentary division of Home Box Office.

#### **CHRISTOPHER CLEMENTS - PRODUCER**

Christopher Clements is a partner at Motto Pictures. Christopher is executive producer of *Weiner* and co-producer of *Life, Animated*, both of which premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival. *Life, Animated* won the US Documentary Directing Award and will be released by The Orchard. *Weiner* won the US Documentary Grand Jury Prize and was acquired by IFC Films and Showtime. He was the creative consultant for the 2015 Sundance Film Festival hit *Best of Enemies*, which was released by Magnolia Pictures and shortlisted for the 2016 Academy Award, and co-produced Ivy Meeropol's documentary *Indian Point*, which premiered at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival and will soon be released by First Run Features. Christopher is co-executive producer of *The Yes Men Are Revolting* directed by Laura Nix and *The Yes Men*, which premiered at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival and was released by The Orchard in 2015, and Alison Klayman's film *The 100 Years Show*, which debuted at Hot Docs. He executive produced *Art and Craft*, which premiered at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival and was shortlisted for the 2015 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Christopher is currently co-producing *The Punch* directed by Andre Hörmann as well as executive producing the CNN Films feature *Enlighten Me*, directed by Jenny Carchman and *Fellove*, a documentary directed by Matt Dillon. Christopher's camera work was featured in Cindy Meehl's *Buck*, which won the 2011 Sundance Film Festival's Audience award. He was production/ editorial consultant for *Gideon's Army*, directed by Dawn Porter, which won the US Documentary Editing Award at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival and *1971*, directed by Johanna Hamilton, which had its world premiere at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival and screened on PBS Independent Lens. Christopher is a writer/director of award-winning animated short subject, documentary and narrative films.

#### **JULIE GOLDMAN, PRODUCER**

Julie Goldman founded Motto Pictures in 2009. She is an Emmy Award-winning producer and executive producer of documentary feature films.

Julie is producer of *Life, Animated* and executive producer of *Weiner*, both of which premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival. *Life, Animated* won the US Documentary Directing Award and will be released by The Orchard. *Weiner* won the US Documentary Grand Jury Prize and was acquired by IFC Films and Showtime. She is executive producer of *3 ½ Minutes, Ten Bullets* and *Best of Enemies* both of which premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and were shortlisted for the 2016 Academy Award *Best of Enemies* was released by Magnolia Pictures to critical acclaim and *3 ½ Minutes, Ten Bullets* won a Special Jury Prize, was released by Participant Media and acquired by HBO for US broadcast. Julie produced *Indian Point*, which premiered at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival and executive produced *The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble*, both to be theatrically released this spring. She also executive produced *The Kill Team* and *Art and Craft*, both released by Oscilloscope and shortlisted for the 2015 Academy Award and *1971*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2015. Julie produced three films that premiered in the U.S. Documentary Competition at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival: *Gideon's Army*, *Manhunt* and the Oscar shortlisted *God Loves Uganda*. She produced *The Great Invisible*, which won the SXSW Grand Jury Prize and was released by RADiUS TWC; *We Are The Giant*, which premiered at Sundance; *A Place at the Table*, which was released by Magnolia Pictures, and executive produced the Oscar shortlisted *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* and SXSW Grand Jury Prize winner *Beware of Mr. Baker*. Julie produced *Buck*, winner of the Sundance Documentary Audience Award, shortlisted for an Academy Award and one of 2011's top five grossing documentaries. She consulted on the Academy Award-winning *The Cove* and produced the Oscar shortlisted *Sergio*. Some of Julie's earlier films include: *Easy Riders Raging Bulls*, *Cat Dancers*, *In The Shadow Of The Moon*, *Better The World*, *What Remains*, *Once In A Lifetime* and *Sketches Of Frank Gehry*.

###