

Writer Theresa Jones speaks to Ciara Laste, who is now based in London in the UK.

Episode Description: *This episode draws a neat symmetry between Theresa and Ciara, with Ciara reflecting on moving to London at the same age Theresa once arrived in Clonmel.*

Her story unfolds through theatre, city life, and family connections, while Theresa's narration brings warmth and coherence, capturing Ciara's energy and optimism. Vivid details of Clonmel life, from home-cooked dinners to pub routines, ground the episode in a strong sense of place.

The Clonmel Exchanges Podcast Project is a partnership project with the Tipperary Museum of Hidden History.

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Hello and welcome to *Loving and Leaving Clonmel*. In this series, we share the stories of Clonmel natives who have moved away and are now living all over the world. We'll hear about their roots, what they miss most, and what life is like for them now.

In this episode, writer Theresa Jones speaks to Ciara Laste, who is now based in London in the UK.

Ciara: Used to be a 30-minute walk to Alexandra Palace. And if you walk up Alexandra Palace at night, you can see the entire city of London. And it's beautiful. You can see all the lights, the skyline. It's really, really gorgeous. So that would be another one of my favourite spots.

Theresa: That was Ciara Laste, formerly of Cherihan, near Clonmel. She moved almost four years ago from the countryside, attracted, like many, to the bright lights of London, in particular to the theatres. She's around the age now that I was when I moved to Clonmel 30 years ago, and I find this synchronicity quite nostalgic, as I've been in Clonmel as long as I was in London.

Ciara is living very close to where I grew up. I wonder whether, like me, that in time she will feel that she is as much from her new home as she was from her old hometown.

I asked Ciara what drew her to London and why she moved there in particular.

Ciara: Being heavily involved in theatre and music and dance, then pursuing that professionally after college, I lived in Dublin and I always knew that London was the next venture I was always going to go to. I always loved the city and loved going to shows and the vibe. So, I knew kind of

once I finished college, I was going to venture over at some point. That's kind of what led me here.

Theresa: Ciara, I'm just wondering, how did you find London at first when you moved to London?

Ciara: I suppose initially it was a little bit daunting, but not too scary. I was more excited than I was nervous. I'd been to London quite often before, so I kind of knew my way around central London, not necessarily outside, but I also had friends over here, so I knew I could always reach out, you know, if I needed some friends or some help or support.

But in all honesty, I think I thrived when I first moved over. It was all very, very exciting. I think I just naturally settled in. It kind of takes a year or two to fully feel like you're at home because it's just so busy and there's a lot going on. But I think initially I was more excited than I was nervous. And I think I just naturally settled in with no problems, no bother. I kind of discovered what areas I loved quite quickly and just went from there then. Yeah.

Theresa: Are you working in London?

Ciara: I've gone down a little path now in that I'm working in a gym branch as a studio manager and instructor for Pilates. I dabble in other jobs as well on the side. So, I do singing lessons. I still have my students back home in Ireland, actually, that I teach via Zoom. I often sometimes facilitate workshops for drama school. So, I've actually flown back to Ireland there a couple of weeks ago to facilitate a movement workshop at Stagecraft.

So, I still dabble in the arts still very much so, even though I'm diving down the path of Pilates and that world at the moment. So that's what I'm doing. I'll always go back to acting for sure. But you kind of do get to a point where you need to start investing in the side hustles, I suppose, to afford London living.

Theresa: Ciara's first love is the theatre and she participated in many local shows growing up. *Rent* with Stagecraft Youth Theatre, *The Wizard of Oz* for St. Mary's Choral Society and also for the Choral Society, *Cinderella's* pantomime. She participated in many professional show. *From Out the Land*, where she was a choreographer, *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, where she was a movement director and also a choreographer and an ensemble for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

In England, she has been an assistant director and ensemble for 1984 for Hackney Town Hall in London. She was also a featured vocalist in a Phoenix Arts Club production in London.

Ciara: I think I joined Stagecraft when I was about 11. I said it to my Mam that I wanted to start drama, because I'd just done so much dancing and singing and all of the above. So, I really wanted to do drama and started Stagecraft and I absolutely loved it. I think I thrived more than anything. It really brought something out in me as a kid.

And then, yeah, I did every single show. I did every single summer workshop. Anything they put on, I would do it. And from there then, I think because I used to help out quite a lot with the younger kids' shows, I think the artistic director saw something in me then and offered me a job to be an assistant director with Stagecraft, which I absolutely jumped at.

And then from there, on the weekends, I always used to teach the younger kids and just kind of would direct their bigger shows and get into choreography. And from there, I got other bigger projects and I'd be taken on board as a choreographer for the likes of *Hunchback* that was put on in town. I was the choreographer on that.

Theresa: And so tell me, we've just had the St. Patrick's Day holiday. Did you ever take part in that?

Ciara: I was very privileged as a kid. I think if I wanted to do something, my parents said, "Yeah, absolutely. You can try it." So, I used to be in Banna Cluain Meala in the Colour Guard. So, I've done the Paddy's Day parade for years. I did it with Alison Cronin as well one year and it was snowing. I remember it was awful. But I've done my fair share of Paddy's Day now, to be fair, in Clonmel.

Since being in college, I did musical theatre. I've done a couple of shows and plays both in Ireland and in London. And the one thing is it's always brilliant and it's the best fun. I absolutely adore being on stage, but it always ends at some point and then you're back to square one. So, you really have to think smart and acting will always be there, but it's good to dabble in other things as well. For sure.

Theresa: It's good to try out acting with the projects. You're very invested in it at the time, you're in the middle of it, and they're almost like family, a little community. And then when that breaks up, it must be like a grief almost, because you go your separate ways.

Ciara: Yeah, it's very hard. Very, very hard. I mean, some of my closest friends are from the works and the plays that I've done. And you do find the people that do stick and they then become part of your life, which is great. But yeah, there are other lovely faces that you'd have the best time with. And life just kind of goes in different ways. Everybody gets caught up in other projects then.

Well, I think the best thing is that we have social media, I suppose, and that kind of keeps us connected in a way. But yeah, it is. I mean, I've worked with a lot of people, I must say. And yeah, it's very hard when a project ends, for sure. You do miss those people in your life.

Theresa: Ciara is the oldest in her family. She has three younger sisters. Her parents work close to Clonmel. Her father is in Merck Sharp & Dohme, the pharmaceutical company, and her mother is a special needs assistant in a local school. They very much encouraged Ciara to follow her dreams with her love of acting and performing and in her move to London.

But although she loves the life in London, I asked Ciara about when she comes home, what does she miss and what does she like to do when she visits?

Ciara: I would get home quite often, actually. I suppose I'm at an age where there's loads of life events happening at home, friends getting married and things like that. So, there's always a reason for me to fly home every so often, or my Mam always laughs at this, I fly home to get my hair done actually because it's so much cheaper than getting the tone over in London. My hairdresser always pencils me in about every four to six months so she does.

By the time you have the flights booked, the hair paid for, it's still cheaper than getting it done in London. So, yeah, I always have a reason to come home. I love coming back to teach the workshops at the drama school and Stagecraft. It's good to always stay in touch with the family and grandparents and just see how everybody's doing.

And the flights are so cheap. I mean, if you book far enough in advance, it's 20 quid, you know, so cheaper than some trains to Manchester. I always said I wasn't a home bird, but to feel a little bit closer to home, it's a nice feeling. It's a nice thing to have.

Theresa: So, is there anything specifically you miss from Clonmel?

Ciara: I would say my family and my friends, and I would say, I suppose, the nostalgia of it all. I suppose when you live far away and you go home and then you're walking around town, or you're walking around — I'm from Clerihan, the small village — it's all that kind of very nostalgic moments and memories.

That's what I missed, was being able to walk around and kind of remember times when you were playing around with your friends. Just certain kind of lovely memories I had kind of growing up, I would say, in the village.

I'm very obsessed with the city. I suppose I'm very overwhelmed with all the opportunities and things that go on over here that I don't really have time to miss.

Theresa: A couple of the places that I love in London are Borough Market for its food and Brick Lane as well, again for the food. Are there any places you like to visit in London?

Ciara: Oh, there's plenty. I quite love all the parks. I'm quite a park person. I'm very close to Battersea Park and that would be one of my favourite parks to kind of stroll around. It's where I did my first ever half marathon, so I love that park.

It's big enough and yet they have this little café in the middle of it where everybody will sit out in the summer and have their bottles of wine and there's live music. It's brilliant.

There's nothing like it, honestly. I mean, I love central London and I hate central London. I would always avoid it now because it's so busy, but I suppose it's always nice to go in and remember you live in London.

Theresa: And how did your family feel when you said you were moving to London?

Ciara: So, when I had just graduated from college, we had been through Covid the last year and a half in my training. So, once I graduated, I moved home for about a year and I always knew I was going to jump to London.

So, I think living in Clonmel really helped. I had some theatre projects come up. I worked in the Park Hotel, I think it's the Talbot Hotel now. I taught singing lessons. I worked really, really hard to save up to make the move.

So, I think, yeah, being able to live at home was great to save that money and then they were kind of very encouraging, I suppose, when I said I wanted to. They said, "Okay, this is the time now where you save up, you organise whatever it is you need to organise and you go and do it."

So, I think they were a little bit nervous. I was the first to flee the nest, but in all honesty, I think they knew it was coming. So, I think they were prepared.

Theresa: So tell me, I know my daughter when she comes back, she crams the suitcase full of potato and Kimberleys. Is there anything you'd miss or have when you come back?

Ciara: Oh, so my mom is quite good now to send me over some Barry's Tea very often.

But I must say when I come home, the only thing I want is a Sunday roast dinner made by my Mam. **[laughter]** If I could package that up and bring it over, I would. But you can get that over here. But yeah, it's not the same.

And another really — there's not many delis over in London where you can just go to a counter and get someone to make you a sandwich from scratch. All these sandwiches are just pre-made and pre-packed and every time all I want is just something made up from scratch. Like, you can't go into your local shop and someone just is there to make you up a sandwich.

So that's what I found. That's something I miss from home as well.

Theresa: The one thing I miss when I go to London and I've had enough of the city because of the traffic or whatever, by the time I come home, I really do love to see the mountains and the woods and listen to the birdsong.

Ciara: Absolutely, yeah. I love the countryside and I love the peace of the countryside for sure. I think you don't really often see the stars sometimes in London. So it is , it's really, really lovely, and especially, I know recently at home people were able to see the Northern Lights. You don't get to see things like that in London and at home.

And even just how green — I love when we fly into Cork. You can just see how green the country is. It's beautiful.

[Music]

No, there are certain things that you would really, really miss. Even being from the countryside and hearing cows across the street, you know, things like that. That's always lovely to hear.

And seeing at Christmas time, you know, there's always a funny story of we'd open up the tab and go to Harney's and then we'd leave to go to Mass across the street. And John, who runs the pub, would say, "Oh, don't worry. You're coming back. We'll keep the tab open."

It's only in Clerihan or in a small village at home that you can open a tab, go to Mass, come back, your table's still there and you can still crack on. You know, you can't do that here. It's nice to be able to do those side of things at home.

Theresa: Ciara, like many of her acting friends, supports herself working in other industries. And Ciara has worked in the fitness industry for one particular gym group since she moved to London. She has found that Pilates very much suits her passion for exercise and the work schedule can be tailored to fit around her acting career.

Ciara: I started for this company when I first moved over on reception in Covent Garden and they've always been quite good if I've gone away, gotten an acting contract, have come back. There's always a job that I can come back to. They've always looked after me and from there I kind of fell into becoming a studio manager.

So, kind of progressing then. It's never a boring day. So, I would usually do like a 9-to-6 Monday-to-Friday type job and then, because you're in the fitness industry, like you're used to that. You're used to hearing the birds in the morning, I suppose, first thing.

My earliest class could be 6:15 a.m. or could be 7:30 a.m., or you could have a cover class at 7:00 p.m. in the evening. You just never really know. Yeah. Come the weekend sometimes I might be a little bit of a shell of a woman.

Theresa: That's really, really nice to land somewhere that does look after you like that and facilitates you.

Ciara: Absolutely. Because even I am moving away from them now. I'm moving on to a more boutique-style Pilates studio, roughly the same kind of hours, but it's down the road.

But even when I told them, I mean, they were only absolutely delighted for me because they could see that Pilates area was more my thing than it was to kind of be in the gym environment.

Theresa: You have some foundation, I suppose, for your adult life now.

Ciara: Some of my closest friends are from those jobs as well. I mean, you don't have much to do but chat at 6:00 a.m. in the morning, to be honest, on reception.

So, I have made some of my closest friends who have also gone on to do amazing things, and a lot of people in theatre worked on reception as well. So, we're always in the same circle and same bubble and learned a lot from each other, which is really, really nice, especially like, when you first moved over to London.

I mean, I knew I had friends over here, but it's always good, you know, not to rely on the friends that you do know but to kind of branch out a little bit.

Theresa: What have you left in London that you'd really like to do?

Ciara: Oh, that's a big question. I suppose there's still plenty of things that I want to see. I want to dive a little bit further out kind of from the city and adventure to some more kind of nice little spots.

I suppose I've never been to Richmond, though. I've never been to Hampstead Heath. All these kind of things. There's definitely more exploring and with this new kind of career path, I'm really excited to see what that can offer.

Especially being in a city, there's definitely more opportunity and networking. So, I'm very interested to see kind of who I meet along the way and then what other opportunities I can get from that, which is always exciting.

And then, yeah, I suppose milestones as well, being able to — I'd love to buy a flat or something, you know what I mean? That's also something I would look forward to in London. And yeah, just kind of, that's it. That's all I can see so far.

Theresa: Did you take anything with you? Was there anything you took with you that was special to you from home?

Ciara: Yeah. So, I mean, I couldn't really — I mean, I left with a 20 kg and a 10 kg, so I was very limited, and a backpack. That's all I moved over with.

But my mom, for my 21st, made me these scrapbooks of all these photos from when I was a baby. And then she made one of my theatre and dancing years. So, I brought those over just because they were so lovely. And then they reminded me of home, which is really nice. It had some of my friends in there, family.

[Music]

I suppose I had this little locket that my dad gave me as well when I was a newborn. So, once I was 18, I was allowed to start to wear it. It's quite expensive. But it has a photo of my parents in it, which is really nice.

That's kind of it really. They're the kind of little personal things I brought from home, but I was very limited to space, sadly, so there was not much I could pack. It was a big struggle.

Theresa: That sounds lovely, though. The locket, that was really nice now. And the scrapbooks. It must have been nice to look through.

[Music]

Theresa: What would you recommend for somebody else if they were thinking about moving?

Ciara: If you have that instinct to move and if it's not for you, you can always go back home. There's no shame in it. I feel like a lot of people feel shame in feeling like they failed or a journey hasn't really panned out to what it was supposed to be.

You learn a lot from it regardless of the outcome. So, if you have a little itch, absolutely go for it because you just don't know what opportunities are out there. I mean, I didn't think I'd be where I am today, you know, doing what I'm doing.

I kind of pictured maybe something a little different, but I can absolutely say that I'm very content and very happy with kind of what I'm doing and really wouldn't have it any other way. So that's kind of my main advice.

Theresa: They say you learn more from the things that don't go quite as planned than you do really from the others.

Ciara: When things don't go to plan, it's flight or fight, you know. And when you do fight those things, you do grow as a person and you learn a lot. And I think it's always the best thing for anybody.

Theresa: And do you think you'll stay in London?

Ciara: I wouldn't know, in all honesty, I'm quite settled here. I would say now my mom always was somebody that it'll always just depend, I suppose, how life works out. I'm definitely settled. I'm not drawn to home just yet. We'll see what life brings.

Theresa: I feel that Ciara, like me, has the best of both worlds. She has the support of her family, who she can fly over to visit whenever she needs to. Plus, she also has the opportunities that London can fulfil in the careers that she enjoys.

She's very lucky to be living her dream while having the comfort of having home so close. I think she has the motivation and confidence to live her life to the full in both London and Clerihan. And I really wish her well.

That was an episode of 'Loving and Leaving Clonmel'. A project by the Clonmel Junction Arts Festival in partnership with the Tipperary Museum of Hidden History.

It was created by Artistic Director Rebecca Lenehan, with podcast consultant Siobhán McHugh and Tipperary Museum curator Marie McMahon.

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