

The forgotten sister of Fred Astaire

Dancer, icon, star

ADELE

A NOVEL

NICOLA
CASSIDY

IN THE MEDIA

BOOK BLURB



1973: Californian journalist **Ellie Morgan** sets out on a mission to research the life of Adele Astaire, famed 1920s dancer and comedienne, older sister to Fred Astaire. She uncovers a wealth of material from the people who knew her.

1905: Eight-year-old Adele Austerlitz moves from her humble home in Omaha, Nebraska, with her five-year-old brother Fred, to New York to begin training at a professional stage academy. They undertake a gruelling schedule of rehearsals and touring, setting the foundations of what will be the most famous and sought-after dance partnership on 1920s Broadway.

1928: Patricia Ryan, a no-nonsense Irish girl takes a job as a housemaid at Lismore Castle in County Waterford, Ireland. All of their lives will intersect, weaving the tale of one of the most famous women of her time – charismatic entertainer, celebrity, fashion icon, muse to artists and writers, and favourite of royalty.



irish daily mail

A new book tells the fascinating tale of how Fred Astaire's sister Adele gave up her own dance career to marry the owner of an Irish castle, writes Marjorie Brennan

WHEN Nicola Cassidy settled down to watch a documentary about her home in County Louth, one evening a few years ago, little did she know the journey on which it would take her. The programme was about the journey of the Irish aristocrat, the sister of the Duke of Devonshire and the ancestral home of the Cavendish family.

Cassidy was in the process of finishing her second novel, and a documentary provided her with the inspiration for her third — Adele, based on the life of Adele Astaire, the sister and former dancing partner of legendary Hollywood star Fred Astaire.

A lot of the time, I just wait for stories to come to me. I have learned to just relax into things, whether that is reading, or watching TV, material just tends to seep in," says Cassidy. "I was watching the documentary about Chatsworth House on Netflix, and there was a little snippet about Charles Cavendish (son of the ninth Duke of Devonshire). It was over in about 30 seconds, but it said he was buried at Lismore (St Patrick's Cathedral) and they had this connection to Waterford. I was like 'What? This is a brilliant story'."

It took Cassidy about two years to research, write and get it out. She was not disappointed by what she found as she began to research how Adele had come from a hard-scrabble childhood to performing in the highest echelons of the English aristocracy, becoming chateleine of an Irish castle.

Long before Fred paired with Ginger Rogers to form one of the most iconic partnerships in entertainment, Adele was the driving force behind her younger brother's career. Adele was originally the one who was marked out for stardom, and Fred began dancing lessons when they moved with their mother Ann from Nebraska, Omaha, to New York to pursue Adele's promising dancing career.

After years touring the US, the pair broke through to Broadway and later became stars in London, where in 1927, Adele met Charles Cavendish after he came backstage after one of her shows. They married in 1932, bringing the curtain down on Adele's stage career and her 27-year partnership with Fred, and leaving the way clear for him to team up with Rogers in the first of the ten musical films they made together.

"It really was a love match with Charles," says Cassidy. "My understanding is that his family weren't too impressed. I compare it to the Meghan Markle situation today —

she was American, she was brash, and was from a poor family. It wasn't who they saw their son marrying. My understanding is that they accepted her eventually and thought she was good for him."

Adele went on to spend a lot of time at Lismore Castle in Co Waterford, and given to the couple as a wedding present. Cassidy was able to gain access to the castle, which gave her an invaluable insight into how Adele must have felt the first time she saw the imposing edifice. Like the heroine of her novel, Cassidy was bewitched by the castle, perched dramatically on the river Blackwater in picturesque Lismore.

"Adele drove herself over the threshold when she came to Lismore. It is really untouched from when she was there, a lot of the decor is the same. Adele came in and modernised the whole castle, as it hadn't really been touched since the 18th century. You could still feel her presence there."

It may have been a fairytale setting but unfortunately, her life with Charles did not follow the theme. She lost several babies at birth and Charles was a chronic alcoholic, dying in 1944, aged just 38. However, Adele retained a strong attachment to the castle, even when she remarried in 1947 to Kingman Douglas, an investment banker and a director of the CIA.



Above, Adele Astaire and Fred Astaire; below, Adele fishing on the River Blackwater; Adele and her husband, Charles Cavendish of Lismore; inset below, author Nicola Cassidy.

A big step for Lismore

"Remarrying was a big choice for her because she disinherited herself but she still didn't want to give up the castle so they came to an agreement that she could have it for three months a year," says Cassidy.

Adele continued to visit Lismore until 1979, and was often joined by her brother Fred. When Adele died in Arizona in 1981, some of her ashes were scattered at Lismore, in somewhat unusual circumstances.

"Ava Astaire [Fred's daughter] actually threw them over the wall because she couldn't get in. Somebody was in residence and she didn't want to ask them so she put them in over the wall," says Cassidy.

The novel is a blend of biography and fiction, which she says plays to her strengths as a writer. "I'm not a biographer or a historian, I'm a storyteller," she says. "A lot of people are drawn to novels and reading as an escape, whereas a biography is more learning than entertainment. I put them both together."

As part of her extensive research process, Cassidy also visited Boston University to view archives that had been donated by Fred's daughter Ava and her husband, Richard McKenzie, who lived in Schull, Co Cork, for 30 years. He wrote a book called *Turn Left at the Black Cow* about their experiences of living in Ireland.

"I couldn't believe all of Adele's

diaries and letters were there. She was a terrific diary-keeper. When you read someone's inner thoughts... for me to be able to access that as a novelist, that is how I really got to know her."

As for her relationship with Fred, Cassidy says Adele was very supportive of her brother.

"Before I started researching, I thought how could she not be jealous of Ginger Rogers, because she [Adele] was dancing with him for 27 years, and the minute she leaves, in comes Ginger Rogers and nobody remembers Adele. But when she bowed out, she was ready, she wanted to get married and have children. It was difficult for her to see some things that happened but overall, she was so proud of Fred."

I compare it to the Meghan Markle situation today. She was American, she was brash, and was from a poor family

Cassidy says Adele was a fiery character but she wouldn't get hung up on jealousy. "They were very different characters. He loved to practise, she loved to party. It was interesting that his career did take off when she bowed out... there was an element of her perhaps holding him back a bit because she was really out front and he was a little bit more behind and when she was removed, he could shine."

Unfortunately, Cassidy herself, like many authors, has lost some of her opportunity to shine, with the cancellation of the launch event of her book due to the Covid-19 crisis.

"It has been really tough. My launch was meant to happen on the Saturday, March 14, and everything shut down on the previous Thursday. I had a family-friendly event organised, with face painters, and a school of dancers coming down, with a little Fred and Adele dancing."

Cassidy says Adele Astaire's fascinating life story is perfect reading for the times we find ourselves in.

"My previous two books had elements of crime fiction, and they were a bit gritty. This has none of that, it is total escapism and glamour, and that's what people need now. It was a joy to write and is hopefully a joy to read."

■ *Adele*, by Nicola Cassidy, published by Poolbeg Press, is available now.

scene + heard



QUIZ

NEW TO THE SCENE

1. Elmo is a character in which American TV show?
2. Name the restaurant where Spangholo works?
3. In the Harry Potter books, what's Hermione's surname?
4. In Roald Dahl's book, which huge fruit did James travel in?
5. In Irish legend, what type of fish did Pádraic mac Cúmbaill use to gain great knowledge?
6. Niall Horan was a member of which boyband?
7. In *The Lion King*, name the cub who grows up to be king.
8. Who is this?



ANSWERS: 1. Sesame Street; 2. Crusty Crab; 3. Granger; 4. Peach; 5. Salmon; 6. C. Direction; 7. Simba; 8. I.

CURRENT AFFAIRS

1. Which soul singer died recently, who had hits 'On My Mind' and 'Lovely Day'?
2. The West Cork Musical Festival was cancelled this week, town says they based...
3. Tiger King on Netflix: the hit shows of the week? What's the name of the character?
4. The Mandalorian series that's a real film franchise?
5. Larry David himself in which show?
6. Syd Little's partner died recently. What was his name?
7. Future Nite by which high in the...
8. Who is this?

Streaming tins on

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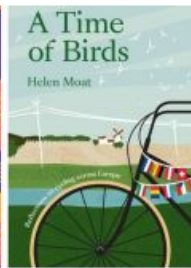
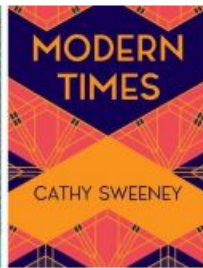
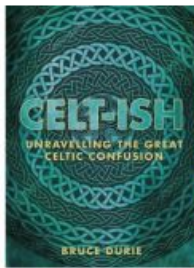
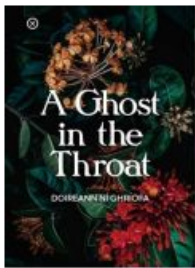
From folk tales to diplomats, botanists to lost homelands, hermits to thrillers

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Deirdre Falvey

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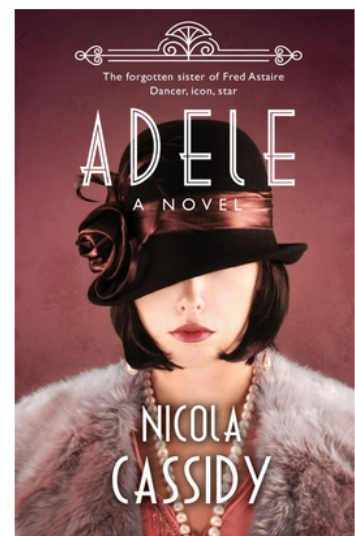
Adele



By Nicola Cassidy. March



Epitomised in song, culture and film, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers are Hollywood pin-ups famed for their talent and charisma as dance stars. But long before Ginger Rogers, Fred Astaire's original dancing partner was his sister Adele and although forgotten by history, she was the driving force behind Tinseltown's most famous dancer and movie star. Historical fiction author Nicola Cassidy follows the early life of the Astaires in a bio-fictional format, from their humble beginnings in Omaha, Nebraska, to their stage training as children, through the Vaudeville and dance hall circuit and finally to Broadway. There Adele shone and throughout the 1920s was more famous than her younger brother Fred, attracting devoted fans, fashion lovers,



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Meghan Markle's flight is nothing new: it's history repeating itself

Fred Astaire's sister Adele married an English duke and reigned over Lismore Castle

© Tue, May 5, 2020, 05:17

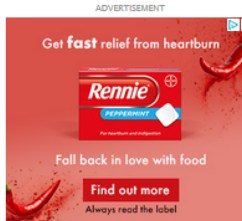
Nicola Cassidy



Adele Astaire

Take one rich, beautiful American, mix her with a popular roy of meringue wedding and turn over on a palace tray to cool. Sg vigorously with the tabloid press, add a pinch of paparazzi, du sibling rivalry, allow to set for two years.

What's that, the Sussex Royals have departed? Oh dear. Soggy



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sibling rivalry, allow to set for two years.

What's that, the Sussex Royals have departed? Oh dear. Soggy bottoms ahoy. This year's Great British Princess Bake-Off has been ... a royal flop.

Anyone who watched the wedding of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry in 2018 would perhaps have expected a bit more longevity and preserve. Their romantic engagement, chic wedding and presentation of a bonny baby boy was a step by step princess dream. Prince Harry isn't even expected to be king. So where did it all go wrong and why have the Sussex Royals excused themselves from palace life?

To seek a little historical reference, we don't have to look too far. History has of course a habit of repeating itself. American women stirring British aristocracy up with a big wooden spoon is nothing new.

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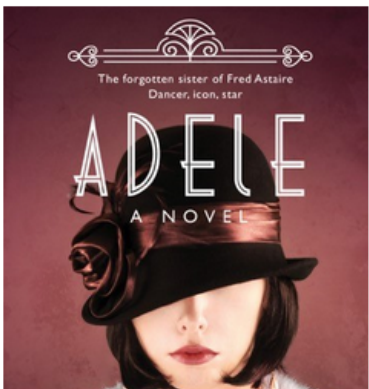


The British men wanted the money. The American women wanted the title. They became known as "dollar princesses". Matchmaking services were set up on both sides of the Atlantic with some publications advertising titled land owners seeking rich, American wives.

For British women, these new, young Americans posed unwanted competition and they closed ranks, shunning the dollar-princess brides. The result was many an unhappy marriage with miserable American women trapped friendless, in a foreign country, usually in draughty houses with haughty, absent husbands.

Not all were miserable, however. Winston Churchill's mother, Jennie Jerome, was a dollar princess and rose through the ranks to become well respected and popular. Downton Abbey, the renowned BBC series set in real-life Highclere Castle, features the American dollar princess Cora Crawley, wife of Lord Grantham. Cora Crawley is based on Highclere's own Lady Almina Carnarvon who brought enough wealth, inherited from her biological father Alfred de Rothschild, to help refurbish the castle into what we know it today.

irish times



THE GLOSS

BEAUTY HISTORY LIFESTYLE & TRAVEL GLOSSARY WEDDINGS FOOD & DRINK CULTURE & BOOKS FEATURES



CULTURE & BOOKS 4 MONTHS AGO

This Story Inspired by An Irish American Style Icon Is The Perfect Quarantine Read

by PENNY MCCORMICK

ARMY READ HAVE

Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers are legendary Hollywood pin-ups, famous for their talent and charisma as dance stars. But a new novel by Irish historical fiction author, Nicola Cassidy, reveals that long before Ginger Rogers, Fred Astaire had an original dancing partner, his sister Adele. Although forgotten by history, she was the driving force behind Tinseltown's most famous dancer and movie star, who also made Co Waterford her home.



THE GLOSS

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Adele, written in a bio-fictional format, follows the early life of the Astaires, from their humble beginnings in Omaha, Nebraska, to their stage training as children, through the Vaudeville and dance hall circuit and finally to Broadway. It was here that Adele shone and throughout the Roaring 1920s became more famous than her younger brother Fred, attracting devoted fans, fashion lovers, and royalty.



THE GLOSS

BEAUTY HISTORY LIFESTYLE & TRAVEL GLOSSARY WEDDINGS FOOD & DRINK CULTURE & BOOKS

Cassidy was inspired to write the book after watching a BBC documentary about Chatsworth House, owned by the Cavendish family into which Adele would eventually marry. Cassidy explains, "As soon as I looked into Adele's story I could see this fascinating character, different to Fred Astaire, much more outgoing, gregarious, and she had a wonderful but tragic life. She spent so much time in Ireland, yet she's not in our memory - she has been bypassed by the Judy Garlands, Greta Garbos, and of course, Ginger Rogers of this world. I wanted to bring her back, remind the world of who she was." Cassidy undertook extensive research for the novel, interviewing sources who knew Adele and travelling to the US to visit the Astaire archives, where she discovered family photographs, detailed scrapbooks and intimate diaries.



Adele moved to Ireland after her marriage to Lord Charles Cavendish in 1932, settling in Lismore Castle, Co Waterford. Adele wrote of her arrival in Waterford, "Most of the girls wore their hair in ribbons. I felt a bit like a queen come to meet her maids. Up ahead on the bridge, two men leaned with their backs to the wall. They looked on curiously from under flat caps. I joined Charlie at the other side of the car to take a proper look at Lismore, curling my arm into his. "It's magnificent." Adele set about remodelling the castle and bringing it up to date and it's often been said, "King John built the castle, but Adele Astaire plumbed it."



the gloss



woman's way magazine

Adele Astaire made Waterford her home, just as Fred's Hollywood career took off...

EPITOMISED IN song, culture and film, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers have become legendary Hollywood pin ups, famed for their talent and charisma as dance stars. But, long before Ginger Rogers, Fred Astaire had an original dancing partner, his sister Adele and, although forgotten by history, she was the driving force behind Tinseltown's most famous dancer and movie star. She also made Ireland her home.

Adele Austerlitz was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1896, three years ahead of her little brother Fred. Showing promise at her local dance academy, her parents were advised to take her to New York to pursue a stage career. At the age of eight and with five-year-old Freddie in tow, Adele moved with her mother Ann, to begin her training, leaving her father Fritz behind in Omaha who worked at Storz Brewing Company.

Their father sent them his wages to support their schooling. Fred started taking dance lessons for something to do. Soon the pair had an act ready for the stage and began touring run-down theatres on the vaudeville circuit. It wasn't glamorous and the children worked hard. Around this time, their mother came up with what she felt was the more showbusiness name, 'The Astaires', and it stuck.

The family went through hard times when prohibition swept America and Fritz Astaire lost his job at Storz Brewing Company. At one point, their mother Ann, pawned her engagement ring to pay for their train fare home from a tour.

WHEN THE children reached maturity, they broke through from Vaudeville to Broadway and began a whirlwind career on the stage, where Adele shone. Much more outgoing than her brother Fred, her charisma and stage presence made her a popular star, both in the US and in London where they burst onto the scene in the 1920s.

At the time, England was going crazy for anything American and the Astaires were the most popular act in London,



Nicola Cassidy's new novel reveals tale of the Astaire family and how sister Adele was the original dance star

selling out hundreds of shows and battling away paparazzi from their dressing rooms. They also were a hit with the British royalty who invited the pair to glitzy after parties.

During these years, Fred developed his famous tap routines, battling piano duels with music by George Gershwin. He worked tirelessly on his routines, much to Adele's chagrin – she was said to be a more natural dancer, but preferred partying to practice.

In 1932, the double act came to an end when Adele left the stage to marry her beau Lord Charles Cavendish, a charming English man and second son to the 9th Duke of Devonshire.

They were given Lismore Castle, Co. Waterford as a wedding present by his family and so began the Astaire connection to Ireland.

At first, Adele was happy to relax in the Irish countryside, enjoying a well-earned break after nearly thirty years of a glitzy but gruelling work schedule. The marriage, while mostly happy, was marred by the loss of their children at birth and by Cavendish's deterioration into chronic alcoholism.

THE ASTAIRES had only parted ways when Fred Astaire shot his first Hollywood role and soon after joined with Ginger Rogers in the first of ten musical films. Fred was unwilling to be partnered up again so quickly but with studio pressure and a realisation that the on-screen partnership was a huge success, he agreed to the continuing movies.

By all accounts, it was difficult for Adele to watch this flourishing relationship and Fred's rising star and she even began shooting her own film in the 1930s. Ultimately, she felt the screen was not for her and she pulled out of the movie causing herself a financial loss. She never begrudged Fred his success and the pair remained forever close.

Adele left Lismore Castle in 1947 after the death of her husband Charles and her remarriage to American investment banker and a director of the CIA, Kingman Douglass. As part of her inheritance agreement, she continued to visit the castle in early summer each year until 1979 when she became too ill to travel.

In 1975 Fred Astaire's daughter Ava Astaire also made Ireland her home, meaning Fred Astaire still had an excuse to visit the emerald isle after Adele died in Arizona in 1981. It was Ava who scattered some of Adele's ashes at Lismore Castle, according to her wishes, forever connecting her to the county she loved so much.

Nicola Cassidy is a historical fiction author from Co. Louth. Her novel Adele tells the story of the Astaires in a bi-fictional tale published by Poolbeg Press.



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