

American Dreamers episode 4

Claire: This is American Dreamers. My name is Claire Clottey and every week together with Aurra Studios, we have fascinating conversations with black Brits, black Americans and their families to explore whether life for black people is better in the UK or the USA.

Orlando: No, we'll never lose the juice. Trust me,

Claire: American Dreamers, is an Aurra Studios original production brought to you by me Claire Clottey. And of course features brave and bold black Brits, black Americans, and their families who have traveled the distance to explore whether life is better for black people in the U S or the UK.

Now on this episode of American Dreamers Orlando Parker Jr. Multi-skilled creative singer songwriter, fashion model, film, and theater actor. And Tropper nor an activist. I mean, the list goes on and on. Well, he's sharing how he's keeping it moving and making a home for himself in the UK. Welcome Orlando.

Orlando: How you doing? I'm doing well. Thank you so much for having

Claire: me. I'm glad to have you here. And I, I kind of want to dive in with you because. A bit of a brief intro call and you're so multifaceted. So I'm going to start with a really big question, actually think back five years ago, did you imagine you'd be living in the UK now?

Orlando: No, it's so funny because you know, when you post on Facebook, you get those members. A year later telling you what you said or what you were doing the prior year. So I remember traveling to the UK for the very first time in 2015. And I remember the week after I got back to the states saying on Facebook, I could see myself living here or living there.

And it was just one of those things, you know, you're posting and you don't really think anything more of it. And then I saw the memory pop up again late last year after I had made the move and it was just. This aha moment of wow. Like. Manifest destiny, or just like putting things out into the universe and seeing them come to fruition, you know, sometimes the subconscious has desires and it wants to do certain things and it, it will just, it will happen.

It will manifest whether you're consciously trying to do that or not. That's what I've learned

Claire: to see. Here's the thing, right? We, you know, several of us have the privilege of traveling around and going on holidays and tour it. And every time I go to a new destination, um, I fall in love. Oh my gosh, I really want to live here.

This is beautiful. I could see myself setting up home here. So there's kind of seeing it cause you had a little bit of a taste of it and there's actually right. You know what? I'm going to pack my bags and I am doing this. How does one get. You know, fantasizing about the whole idea of living in the new country.

Whew.

Orlando: So for me, it was a lot of research. I didn't just say, okay, I want to live there. So I'm going to buy a plane ticket, sell all my things and just leave. I was traveling here two to three times a year for about five years before I finally moved here. And during that time, what I was doing was. Building relationships with local business owners, with people in my industry.

I'm a singer first. So with pub owners, venue owners, other musicians, I was recording. I was shooting music videos here and also just not taking from the community or giving something back. So I was doing. Music videos, what I was actually hiring the production team to do the video. So it was like this give and take and just establishing myself here so that when I moved, I would have some roots here.

I would have, you know, career opportunities, income, revenue, streams, already set in place. And so that's what, that's the way I did it. And no one told me to do it that way. I didn't read any books saying that that's what you do. It was just what I, I felt like I needed to do to make it happen for me. I was able to do it just by being genuine and always being a walking resume.

Well, you

Claire: touched a couple of nerves for me in what you've just said. You know, I moved from London to Las Vegas and I more or less did the same. I was researching. I was traveling frequently. You'll seen in the world, you know, that's keep it very real. You're seeing in the world before people take the time to bother, to get to know who you are.

And as you present, you're a black man with a really cool blonde Mohican at the moment. Yes. I love it

from all angles. Thank you for giving me a little pivot there. How did you think that British people. It would receive your, what did you think their perception of you would be when you arrived?

Orlando: Honestly, I did not think about that at all. Or consider what they would think of me. I feel like I'm, uh, I'm unlike a lot of black people.

I know, and I always, this is going to be a little political, but I, I have this joke going that I would never, I could have never lived at in a certain period because of the way I am. I. I believe that I have a right to be here and I have a right to all the things that anyone has the right to, you know what I mean?

And that's sort of how I carry myself and how I navigate through the world. So I never walked into a space thinking, oh my God, do I belong here? Or are they going to accept me? It's kind of like, you're going to have to decide within yourself how to. Except me being here because I'm going to be here, whether you like it or not.

That's sort of my mentality, whether it, I don't always have that in the forefront of my thinking, but I've learned over time. That's just who I am. And so when I came here, it wasn't a matter of, are they going to like me? It's just like, I'm here. This is what I'm here to do for those that are willing to accept and buy into.

Great. And those who aren't then, you know, have a nice life.

Claire: That's a really empowered way to approach life. You know, I wish I was able to say the same. I'm not, I came here or before I came here, I was thinking to myself, how am I going to be received as. Black British Gorney and Londoner. I walk around with dreadlocks.

I know shadism is an issue and it's something that, you know, I'm very conscious of in the UK. Um, I know it plays out here in America, so I was thinking, what dynamic am I about to walk into and how am I going to hold my space in the U S so. You know, bold of you to kind of say, you know what, that didn't really cross my mind.

I was just ready to say

Orlando: it honestly didn't then maybe, you know, living in places like North Carolina helped prepare me for being from Detroit. Michigan helped prepare me, but I think I come from a family where it was like, no one was ever. Subservient or walks around with their heads down, like come from an educated family of predominantly women on my mother's side, very strong women, college educated women, worldly women.

And so I guess my outlook on the world is I see it for what it is, but I also see, I see my place in it. And, um, I believe in being sort of aggressive and ambitious and demanding and taking what's yours. And so, you know, that's kind of how I approach everything. It's like I have, I deserve to be here just as much as anyone else does.

Claire: Has the UK been like for you?

Orlando: Well, I'm starting to hear things now that I live here, but I can only go based on my own experience. And my experience is it's a very diverse place. It's everything that America is not. And I'm talking about London, people here are from everywhere and it's what makes London so beautiful is the diversity and how people respect each other.

And they don't really blink at, you know, if you're on the tube and you hear someone speaking a different language or they're dressed a certain way, it's just like, it's London. And it's celebrated. There's something for everyone here. And I think everyone sort of feels welcome. And that's a beautiful thing about London.

Claire: I appreciate that. You know, I held from London and, you know, live in here in Las Vegas. I feel very much, it's quite similar in that sense. And that's probably one of the reasons or the main reason that I thought, right. I can do this it's because anything goes here. Everyone's coming in from everywhere.

Where in everything. And I really needed to be around if I was going to make the big move. That was a must have,

Orlando: but it's hot there, right?

Claire: Oh, I love it. Goodness. I love it. I love the heat. I was born for the heat. This melanin desires, the heat. You don't get much of it over there at the moment. No. So while she prepared in terms of, you know, coming back and forth between the U S the UK, that's like practical, but there's like the mental, there's the emotional and the financial preparation to move.

Like, what was that process like

Orlando: for you? Well, financially, unfortunately, as things currently are, this is not something that I think anybody can do. And I'll be very honest about that. It costs a lot of money to make an international move. It costs a lot of money to travel back and forth. You do learn how to travel sort of on a budget and how to do it.

Smart. You're not going to go and like be dining out in five star restaurants every night, either intaking, taxis, everywhere you go. You're going to have to learn how to get on the tube. You're going to have to learn how to maybe have one of your daily meals from Tesco. Get the three for three meal deal.

And then maybe during your trip, you have one really nice night out. Okay. You learn those things and then you also learn. If I live in North Carolina, I'm not going to fly straight from North Carolina to London. I'm going to go to New York first and then fly from New York to London because the ticket is only one third of the price.

So you just learn those things. You're preaching

Claire: to the converted because you know, people were looking at me like, oh, you must be rich. And I'm thinking now I catch red eyes. I have worn this top, like a million times over and I will continue to wear it too. It's got holes in it. If it means that I

Orlando: can catch flights, things that you may see me wearing that I have like 11.

The music videos on YouTube now, professionally shot music, videos on YouTube. Most of the things that I'm wearing and those videos are from vintage shops. And I don't, I mean, I let everyone know. I think that's who I am. That's my style. I don't subscribe to the Balenciaga. Giving, um, non-African-American made labels my money.

That's not who I am not saying that I don't wear anything designer. Cause I'm looking around at a coach bag and I have Gucci shoes that I probably had since I was in high school and different things that are designer. But the majority of what I wear has vintage and. Whatever you see me wearing in my music video, you'll see me wearing at a show.

And that's another way of how I saved my money and managed my money. But what I did was I managed a dental practice during the day for about 10 years. North Carolina and I made, I mean, I was the manager, so I made a decent living and I performed at night and on the weekends and I was so busy performing and I modeled a lot as well, doing a lot of bridal magazines and fashion shows.

And whenever I got paid, I saved that much. And I reinvested it into my career. I wasn't out buying TVs or trying to pretend like I have more than I did. I was strategizing and looking at the bigger picture. So that's how I used my money that I earned from seeing gain. When I finally moved over here, I literally had an envelope full of all the tips that I've ever received singing.

And I cashed that in. I exchanged it for a British currency. Like I literally had all that money in an envelope for, for years. And so that's what I did. And also investing. Um, I'm a, I'm a huge investor in the stock market. And I did all of that in preparation to make this move, just knowing I needed to have the money to do this.

Claire: There's things in the us. I've noticed that I really can't stand. And I want to know if there's anything that you can't stand. And one of the things I can't stand or. Baffles me is the fact that people still smoke quite a lot in the U S and it really bugs me that I walk into a casino and I just see cigarettes and thinking, are we still really there?

America, you still so far behind the UK, far behind.

Orlando: Oh, yeah. That's disappointing that the Americans are so far behind on that because I mean, we know the effects of, of, of cigarette smoking and if a person chooses to do that to themselves, then, you know, so be it, but to do it to someone else, you know, like you were saying, you're going into a casino or something like that.

You sit and have to be subjected to someone else's vice and that's disappointing what. Behind here that I'm disappointed in. Um, the healthcare system is one thing they talk about universal health care as if it's, um, very progressive. And perhaps in that respect of everyone having insurance, it is. But in terms of like, I tore my meniscus.

A month and a half ago and had to go into the hospital and experience your health care system. And I was waiting for seven hours. The lobby was extremely crowded. I was sitting on the floor with a torn meniscus. My knee

when writing me was two and a half times the size of the other one. And I'm like, I'm sitting on the floor.

It felt very primitive. When I finally got back there, the doctor said, well, that's what happens when you give everybody free healthcare? And I'm just saying, this is the doctor saying this to me, St. Mary's hospital. You know who you are, doctor. I called them out because I thought that was so rude and cruel.

And it's like, it's not really, that's not the reason. It's just that you're disorganized. Your facilities are archaic and could use a, you know, an updating and then your system can use an update. I've I've managed medical dental practices. So I know how to run the flow of triage and checking patients in and that whole situation.

And so I was sitting back observing things there and witnessing staff that just didn't want to be there. And I don't know how much money they were being paid, but that. Played a part into there, their recalcitrant attitudes, whatever. It just was a sort of archaic sort of system. And I think that's like the only thing I've really seen here that stuck out like a sore thumb,

Claire: because I think people romanticize the fact that the UK have the NHS and whilst, you know, I've benefited from the NHS.

I love it. I'm a paid into it. It's not. All singing and dancing. We've got it all figured out system that is lacking in all other dimensions. It's

Orlando: not this, this magical fantasy that people think it is. And we in America, we want to implement it so badly because healthcare is ridiculously expensive in America, and it's not fair.

And there are so many poor and underprivileged people who need healthcare and they don't have it, or they have to settle for the worst of the worst. And so we desperately want to have, we definitely want to reform our system, but at the same time, don't make it seem like what the UK has is like the holy grail or it's the template that we want to follow, because it's not perfect either.

I can tell you that from someone who's experienced it, there are a lot of flaws. And the technology is very archaic. I haven't been to every hospital and every facility, but I've been to one of the major hospitals here. And I can tell you that the technology is pretty behind. That's one of the things that they could work on.

Claire: Sure. Well, let's say in music and arts, we're pretty on an, on a level. I mean,

When it comes to the arts,

Orlando: these are my British arts. You guys are a step above everyone else. Yeah. I mean, yeah. That's why I'm here. That's the main reason I'm here is because you guys are the leaders. In the world, in my opinion, I've been to Paris and I've experienced the arts there. It's not the same London.

Nobody does it like London. And I hear it like, Milan's the fashion capital. And so I I've been to Italy too. I haven't been to Milan yet, so I can't speak on that, but I know the fashion in London. Like nowhere in America, that's for sure. And the arts are respected and appreciated and celebrated here in a way that sort of sucked me in because that's what I am first and foremost as an artist, a creative.

And so I was looking for my people and I don't care whether they're black, white, gay, straight male or female, I'm just looking for my artists, people, my creatives to help me be the best that I can be. And like what I came here, I was like, These are my people. I was looking at how people were addressed and how they talked and how they responded to me, to everyone who I tell I'm a singer here responds to it in such a respectful, I just can't really describe it in America.

It's like, Oh, but, but do you have some, do you have a real job kind of a thing, you know, it's that attitude like Americans are just so conditioned to work for someone else and slave for other people that the entrepreneurial attitude is just not really prominent there, especially if it comes to doing something sort of off the beaten path, like being a painter or a designer of clothes or a singer or a songwriter or a makeup artist, you know, Those things aren't real jobs to them still it's so that's what I love about London.

I've

Claire: watched some of your music videos. I dumped on YouTube and it was, it was great to see you in one video, you had this beautiful red light from. Coat thing. And you were shimmying and you lied on the floor. I was like, at one point, I was like, please get up off the floor. Do you know what is on British ground?

On the slow, on the paper, come on, pick yourself up

Orlando: for the arts. You have to suffer for the arts. And that's

Claire: what they say. I love that you captured. The landscape. I could see the London. I could see that you went to the east end and I saw Bo and you know, how has London influenced your music and your arts?

Orlando: It continues to influence me. I think that. Some of the best work I've done has been here. So that song was a cover of a Gnarls Barkley. The one you were just describing of his song, crazy, which I love. And it's a song that it's my theme song for being an African American from the inner city who moved to London.

During the pandemic. It's crazy. It's a crazy thing to do, right? You have to be. Yeah. I, I directed that video. I produced the, the recording. I recorded it in, in Layton, uh, a studio that I use out in Layton with a, um, engineer who I love very much, um, and directed the video. And I remember saying to them, I want my.

In Detroit in North Carolina who may never have the opportunity to come to Europe or to England. Cause you're not Europe anymore. Brexit. I want them to have a free tool. I want all my videos to be a free tour guide. So I argued with these videographers that I had hired because they were like, no, let's do this shot.

Let's do that shot. I'm like, no, I want big Ben. I want the London eye. I want it to be laying on the ground in the opening and I want it to pan out to so you can see like how it is when you walk down the Tams at south bank. I want people to get a glimpse of that. It's not all about me, these videos, it's a lifestyle.

It's about the setting that I'm in as well. It's, it's a, it's a lifestyle, the culture, you know, I'm a culture innovator. So I want to be showing people. The world who may never have an opportunity to see what, what me and you have seen, you know, living in different countries and stuff. Most people won't get to do that, especially black people.

And we have to always be very, very conscious and thoughtful of that when we do our work. Yeah, I, I'm always trying to, to celebrate London as much as I possibly can in my work, because it's an amazing place. And that's why I'm here is because I love it so much. And I want other people to love it because I love it.

Just like we want every other, we want people to love everything we do. The food, our lovers, you know, everything. We want everybody to love what we love. So, yeah.

Claire: Right. I'm going to take it back to the, start with the conversation and be really practical about things because people need to know, um, you know, they've see, they might get the free tool from the videos, but they need to know how do you do this other than saving money.

Um, you don't just buy a plane ticket and get the right to stay in the UK for more than three months. So we're talking about immigration. How do you complete that

Orlando: process? Right? Yeah. That's something we do need to talk more about. So you can't just come over here. The longest you can come here without a proper visa is six months.

You don't really need to take out a visitor visa. You can just come for six months. After that six months you have to leave unless you are getting sponsored by an employer, getting you're not allowed to search for work while you're here. Technically, even though people do, but it's not legal. So you can't like can't come as a visitor on a vacation and then be like filling out job applications.

And the idea of that is very practical. People live here. And need jobs. And it's not necessarily fair for someone to come from another country and to come over here and start taking jobs from people who are actually living here. And this is where they're from. So you have to do things properly. So the right way to do things would be to apply online from where you live, which I have done.

And if you're accepted for an interview, you can come over here, do your interview, or you can do an interview online. And if they want you, they can sponsor you. The thing I don't like about sponsorship is your, uh, I feel like your property of theirs, you can't work for anyone else. So you may get like a two year or what, however long it is, and that you can only work for that one company.

You can't quit. They could treat you like crap. If you quit, you have to go back home or hurry up and find another person to spawn to you. So I was like, what? We're not doing that because I'm an artist I'm going over there to perform and sing. So there's no way I can work for one person. I wouldn't be able to do what I'm coming to do.

So I was very challenged with, well, what do I do? How do I figure out how I can. Live there for years at a time, legally still perform everywhere. I'm offered, uh, to perform, make the money. If I need to do daytime work, I can work for any different company. I want to work for. How do I do that? And through a lot of research, I learned that I could start my own company.

That was the ticket. So I'm like, well, what do I want to do? I'm passionate. Skincare. I'm passionate about fashion. I'm passionate about music, obviously. You can't just be anything that you want to do. It has to be something that is viable. Innovative and sustainable. It has to meet these three bullet points for the UK government, because again, they just don't want anybody coming in and competing with like, I can't say, oh, I make the best cakes.

And I want to, I want to start a bakery in the UK. Well, there's tons of bakers here and they're not going to allow me to come in and compete with the people who are already here. They're from here, they're paying taxes. This is their city. So if I were to come in with. It would have to be something that they have not thought of, that they have never done.

I would have to be contributing something brand new. So I decided to do fashion and of course there's tons and tons of fashion entrepreneurs. So it was like, okay, I have to do something that has not been done before. And so I decided to come up with a shoe that's made from recycled material. I can't say what the material is because it's patent pending, but it's something that is not being done.

And it's also something that's going to help clean up. The local environment. So it's good for the it's good for the UK. So I'm contributing something I'm not just coming in and trying to take that's the reason they make you do things. The way that you have to do them is because there are people here struggling to make it.

And so why would we let you come in and just set up shop? You know what I mean? You have to be it's, there's a give and take. And I, I, I get that as a business person. So, so what's the visa, it's a start-up visa. So there are two types of fees for entrepreneurs. There's the startup visa and there's the innovator visa.

So if you're just starting your business, You're going to be on a startup visa. You haven't developed it really. You're not trading publicly. You may not even have a product for sale just yet. Once you get up and trading, you can apply for another visa, which will take, which is a three-year visa. And that's called the innovator visa.

That's what we'll be applying for in 2023, when this visa is up. Cause I'm pretty confident that my, my business is going to be up and trading by then. It better be so. That's the plan and that's the route I'd stick. You don't have to do fashion. Any, any business you can think of that is not already here.

You can do that. And it, you have to have an endorsement letter from a government approved endorsing body. And so if you go to the UK website, that uk.gov website, they'll give you a list of everyone who can endorse your B's up. Most of them are going to say. In order for me to endorse your visa, you're going to have to take my course, buy my accelerator course.

Rightfully so because they can't just be endorsed in any OBS and put their name behind it because they can lose their ability to endorse, which is huge. So they have to make sure that your business does meet the criteria that you do know what you're talking about, that there is a realistic plan here and they will write your business plan.

They will write your endorsement letter. And you send that with your visa application and then you kind of do like this. Yeah, my accelerator course through fashion angel who endorsed me and wrote my business plan. It costs 5,500 pounds, one payment. Wow. Then when that came out of my American account, that was like almost \$8,000.

Just to give it to you guys real, like how much this costs after doing all of that. I still had to pay for my visa. Those fees had to pay for my healthcare surcharge. That was another, you know, 1800 American dollars that you pay up front before you can even send your visa application, you have to pay the healthcare surcharge.

You can't just come over here and be falling down and breaking things and going to the hospital and thinking they're going to patch you up for free. Cause you're in, you're in London. That's not how it works. We have to pay like the people who are from here. \$1,800 for two years as a bargain compared to the, the American healthcare system.

I mean, I have a sister, who's an educator. She pays over 500 a month just for her and her husband for TPP. So basically for an entire year, that's what I paid for myself. You know what I mean? 1800, 900 a year. So, um, you pay all that. So it's you, if you listening to the amounts of money, I'm throwing out, you have said, you know, 8,000 us dollars just for the accelerator course for these people to endorse my visa, then you got another 1800 for your healthcare.

You got 600 for the actual visa application itself. You got to FedEx. Your passport to New York city. Once you take your biometrics appointment, when they do your fingerprints and your FBI background check, and they have to send that to the UK gov so they can check it over and then have it FedEx back to you.

That's a hundred dollars in itself, just so it's, it's a lot of money constantly and time as well, and time and stress. Can you imagine paying all that money? Getting to the finish line. And then like, not even knowing if I'm going to be able to come here, if I'm going to be granted my visa, they, there's no way to check the status of it.

You literally mail you FedEx, your passport and your visa application off, and you just kind of wait and it could be a week. It could be two weeks. It could be a month. And it just so happened. Mine's just came in the mail, um, November 1st and literally I got. November 1st. I didn't know when I was going to receive it back.

I opened it up sweating because they're supposed to put us a new stamp in your passport to visa stamp. And I'm like, where is it? Where's this stamp. And it was there. And I was like, I could have like start speaking in tongues and the holy ghost in the middle of the street. And they're in North Carolina where I was, cause I was just like, thank you, God.

Like, cause I hadn't really thought beyond that point because this was my plan. And I never said, well, what if they don't approve your visa, then what do you do? And what do you do about all the money you spend? Like I realized when I mailed my passport off that I hadn't thought beyond that. Because I just knew this was what I was doing, so I was terrified.

And so I got my visa back in the mail and I literally bought my plane ticket to come here for the very next day. Wow. Yeah, this was just, we were talking about last week, week before last year, I just got back here a week and a half ago. So, and again, to, to be able to just get a plane ticket to come back, you have to have money.

And so you're just always working, always saving, always investing, always planning. You can't come over here and be trying to ball out and keep up with people. 'cause you gotta have your, your capital, your operating expenses. And so I tell people all the time, like, I would love to go have tea with you.

Cause that's what you guys do over here at the Brits. But honestly, I'm trying to start a business right now. And so, you know, if you want to go to like Tesco, then go to the park, we can do that

Claire: parks and our open spaces and our casual link-ups, it's not always about tea and crumpets. You know, and skins, which is what everyone's like, British people drink so much tea.

We drink coffee over here. I know America people who drink tea, not in the numbers that British people do, but I know them still.

Orlando: You're absolutely right. So

Claire: I have met a number of African-American women who have done the move. I have met a number of black, British women, black, British men who have done the move.

You know, we were just being mobile out. I have found that I have met very, very few African-American men who have moved. What have you noticed that you are alone or is there a whole crew that we don't know about? I need to tell my friends about, cause they all looking at America means.

Orlando: No, there is no underground movement.

So I don't know any either. Unfortunately, no, I don't, I don't know any other, I don't know, one other black man from America and in the UK. In London. Yeah. In, in any, in Manchester anywhere. And you know, like I made a ton of people on social media as well. You know, I have followers on YouTube and Insta and all that stuff.

And even on those platforms, I have not encountered any other black Africans, any other African-Americans in males. I don't know

Claire: how that feels because, you know, I know that people like to for safety, People like to connect with people who are like them in the initial phases of going into someplace new.

So you've had no one to kind of say, look, bro, this is how we maneuver it. This is how we navigate. This is, you know, this is how you're going to get by. Lonely isolated place to be, or maybe I'm putting words in your

Orlando: mouth. No. I'm. If you think about it too much, it can be, you literally have to stay focused on your objective and have tunnel vision because there's all these emotions.

That will take you under, if you let it, you know, I miss my grandmother and my grandmother's she's 85 now and not in the best of health, you know, I could go on like, oh, I'm over here in London. I should be there in Detroit with my grandmother while she's in her last, you know, years or my, my, my sister's there, my brother, my nieces, my nephews, there's all those things that can constantly pull and take me, I don't think.

I can't think about it. I have to focus on what I know I'm supposed to be doing with my life, what my purpose is. And if I get caught up in the fears, then they will consume me. So I never think I'm alone. My Angela says, I don't know if I know people over here that I talked to even black, British people.

They don't know my Angela, which is blasphemy to me. Yeah, you should know her, but she's she has this, um, is there's a video I always post once a year about. Being a rainbow in someone else's cloud. And she says, whenever she goes onto the stage, she takes with her, everyone who she's ever encountered anyone who's ever been kind to her.

She says long gone rich, poor gay street. I say, come with me, I'm going to the stage. Like every time I watched that video, I just want to ball. Cause I'm like, that's me. Like my mom's deceased. And when I'm entering the UK border with my new visa in hand, I'm like, yeah, mom, come on, let's go. We're doing this.

You know, all my, my brothers and sisters who won't, who may not ever make it here, I'm like, come on, y'all we're doing this. We're going through. And so that's kind of my mentality. Everywhere. I go, if I'm going into the coffee shop, it's not just me. It's like, we're all going into that coffee shop in Britain.

And so I never really feel alone in that way. I feel like I am. Uh, part of something bigger than me. And I'm pretty sure when I'm, when I'm long gone, I'm going to be in some portion of history. Somewhere being the only has taught me to be more of a, a human being, sometimes in a black band, even though like you, can't not be black and I wouldn't want to not be black, but sometimes you do have to step aside and just try to be a person who relates to Croatian people.

Because I have a guitar player. Who's from Croatia, have a guitar player. Who's from Argentina. I have, uh, uh, guitar player or bass player and a keyboard is who's British from here, which you rarely meet like true British people

anymore. And so when I'm with them, I'm just like, I'm not the black, I'm not black Orlando and you're not white for Cuno and you're not Croatian this person.

It's just like, we're just all musicians. And we all want the same thing to be successful. And to be able to do what we love and to be able to like provide for ourselves and our families with our talents. And so I walk into spaces with that. I T yesterday, this just happened. There's a pub in Pimlico that I've known for a couple of years of traveling here.

And I was sitting there and I had to take a zoom car while I was about to eat my veggie burger and the owner overheard. And I was like, yeah, you know, She knows I'm a musician and everything. And I'm like, yeah, you know, I really don't want to do that because it's not in my industry, but I need to make some extra money right now, so I can build capital for my business.

So I'm looking at some, you know, just picking up whatever jobs I can, extra jobs I can pick up. Next thing, you know, I walk out of the pub with a job as a bartender there. So I'm going to be, I'm starting bartending at this pub in Pimlico next week. And this thank you. The owner has known me and we've always had a really good rapport, but I've never wanted or needed anything from her.

But when she heard me talking yesterday, she was like, if you wanted a job, I would hire you in a second. And I was like, Are you serious? Cause I would, I would love to work here. Like I would definitely tend bar here, you know, whatever. And so yeah, that happened in that moment. It was just like, she's a business owner.

I'm a business owner is not, it doesn't matter that she's a white woman from Australia or that I'm a black man from America. We're just two people trying to make it in this city. We're none of us, neither of us are from here and we get each other. We get each other, you know, she's the she's, she manages that.

Um, and, and as part owner in that pub, I'm doing my thing and we both are trying to do what we're trying to do. And so I try to connect with people on that level. And it seems to work for me when I forget about the other stuff for a minute. And just try to focus on, on that. Connection connection.

Claire: I will say I'm just a small disclaimer.

Be prepared to not receive as many tips as you would get. If you were in the us, you're already not good. Right? Cause I don't want you to go in there and then come out with a heavy heart.

Orlando: No, but the difference between this and between that and, and, and us in America is that you guys actually pay people, a livable wage, most places.

They don't pay them a livable wage there. So they're like, depending on tips and unfortunately that's just not good here. They don't pay people \$2 an hour or two pounds an hour, which is what they're paying American servers. Yeah.

Claire: Quick questions. Because you did mention that you put on a couple of pounds during COVID of what British food

Orlando: loving.

So when I hang up from you. There is a Jamaican. I can't remember the name of it. I was in Camden. I don't know how it ended up in Canada and the other day, but I was in CAMBA and found this Jamaican restaurant and met Jamaican food, Bahamian food, Cuban food. That's like my favorite stuff. Like island, rice and peas.

Um, stewed fish. I eat a pescatarian diet, so only fish jerked fish and all that, that I had the best jerk Sam. Two days ago, and it was sitting on a bed of like sweet potato and something else that they kind of like mashed up and they had the jerk sauce, drizzled all over it and it came up and I I'm going back to that.

Okay,

Claire: you got me salivating, stop, stop there. And when you come back and forth between the us and the UK, what do you need to put in your suitcase and bring to the UK with you? Cause we just don't have it.

Orlando: Ooh, let's talk about the pharmacies here. God pharmacies are so different melatonin, which is something that our body produces, but some are some of our bodies don't produce enough of it.

And so we have to go to the pharmacy and buy it so that we can sleep well. And it's a natural sleep aid without putting chemical, too many chemicals to, to get that here, you have to have a prescription I'm like I have to have a prescription. To have something that my body produces already. Yes. So when I go to America, I make sure I get as many melatonin gummies as I can.

And I stuffed them in my suitcase and I'll bring those back. That's pretty much the main thing is. The melatonin. Oh. And my toothpaste to keep my teeth white. I use an arm and hammer whitening toothpaste, but you actually just start selling it here. I, I noticed, so I don't need to go there for that anymore.

Claire: Funny story about melatonin. Right? So, um, during this COVID season COVID period, I was, um, so this year I was traveling back from the U S to the UK and I sat next to a lady who had these melatonin gummies. We would we'd just go into conversation. She was a white lady. To be honest, neither here, nor there.

We would just have it to humans, having a conversation. We spoke about sleep and how jet lag is just a killer for me. And she said, why don't you try this meditation? Or what have you not? And she said, I've got some, you know, I've got some of my suitcase, but you're more than welcome to this bowl here. Um, I took the bottle.

It was half open because I was British people, really polite. I didn't really know what to say. I was like, oh, thank you. In my mind. I'm thinking, I don't know what this is. This is like a sleeping drug. What if it's an illegal drug in the UK? What if I get held up at the border, then I'm going to have to say, oh, this lady over here, she just gave me this melatonin.

And you know what? Just as we came off the. I had to tap on the Sheldon was like, thank you so much for this, but I need to give it back because my mom would just tell me, don't take things for strangers. I'm a big woman in my thirties. That was the only way I could get out of the situation. And then I discovered that melatonin is a thing.

And now I've actually got a ball over here. It's great. And I'm looking forward to seeing more of your videos and your photo shoots and hear more of your music. Please tell people how they can connect with you and see what you're up to.

Orlando: I'm so passionate about music and singing so much so that my latest project, which is entitled a singer's life, it came out on Spotify and iTunes on October the first I believe, and it's a three song EAP with some spoken word on there.

There's a cover of crazy by Gnarl's Barkley. And there's a cover of a song that I sing in my shows called stand by me. It's a standard. Bye Ben E king. And then there's a song I wrote called broken. And that song is about. What an artist or a musician goes through when they step off the stage or when they leave a show

or they leave a, uh, gallery art gallery shore or whatever it is, where there's all their people are there.

And when they leave that space and they're alone, what artists actually go through emotionally is what inspired me to write that song. And, you know, we don't talk about depression or. In the African-American community, especially with men. And so it's just, it's been important for me to touch on that as much as I can, but that's what broken is about.

It's, it's a song about overcoming adversity and depression and loneliness and things like that. And it's very fitting for the time that we live in. Now, a lot of us have been alone a lot for the past couple of years with COVID. Yeah, it's just, you

Claire: have tempted, you have tempted the listeners. I'm sure.

They'd just need to know what's your social media handles so they could tap in.

Orlando: Yeah. Everything is Orlando Parker, Jr. So I have my, my new website, Orlando Parker Jr. Com just went live. Five days ago. So you can find everything about me and that everything about what I'm doing in London, what I'm doing in the community, how you can collaborate with me.

If you are into saving the environment and you want to learn about sustainable shoe wear and how we can use some recycled material to actually make things that we can put on our bodies and actually look nice. I don't want to make anything. Ugly from recycled. Cause I feel like everything that is green, like the cars are always ugly or even the clothes that people come up with.

I'm like, well, why can't you do something cute with the recycled material? So my stuff has got to be cute. It's not going to be ugly ingrained. It's going to be cute and green. I'm going to make people want to wear, you know, biodegradable stuff. Like those smart cars and stuff are always so ugly. It's like, come on.

Yeah. So anyway, we're going to do it the right way. So come on in and sign up and subscribe to the website at Orlando Parker Jr. Com Spotify, YouTube iTunes. It's all Orlando Parker to your.com. And I appreciate. And the support that I get from the people out there. Well,

Claire: I appreciate having this, having had this conversation with you, it's been an absolute pleasure and delight, so thank you, Orlando Parker Jr.

Orlando Parker Jr. Keeps it moving and continues to find a way to use his artistic gifts as international currency claiming his right to exist anywhere in the world. He proves that you can be an American with a dream that manifests outside of the us in his case, the UK, to share your experience of being black in the UK versus USA.

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