

# Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

## Puerto Rico in March – Summer at the tip of Winter

NATALIA KETAREN

Puerto Rico, “the rich port,” is an unincorporated territory of the United States. To us travellers from the US, that means that the currency is in dollars, our cell phones work and we need only a valid US license to travel there. San Juan is the capital. It is one of the most important ports in the Caribbean, situated on the northeastern side of the Island. Aside from its beautiful beaches, Puerto Rico is home to the US’s only tropical rainforest, El Yunque. We took a seven day trip through this lovely island, and here’s a little of what we saw and did.

### *Aguadilla*

We arrived at Aguadilla’s Rafael Hernandez airport by 9:30 am, which was the benefit of an early morning JetBlue flight out of NYC. The city is located on the North Western tip of Puerto Rico, a region famously known for its crashing beaches, a mecca to surfers world-wide. Aguadilla’s airport is quite small, and before we knew it, we were on our way to our lodgings for the week in our rental car. Puerto Rico is best explored by car. Public transport is scarce and car rentals, though quite steep compared to US mainland prices, are the best option, especially if you want to move freely around the island.

Many accommodation options are available, from hotels to hostels and all that’s in between. We chose to rent out a condo for the week. It allowed for a less intrusive visit and felt more like a home-away-from-home, except for the infinity pool overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

### Food

Puerto Rican cuisine involves a lot of fresh seafood, barbecued chicken, and rice. The local beer is Medalla, that is best served in cans, in a cooler on the beach,

and the local rum is unlike the typical white rums found in NYC, it’s brown and it’s strong, and it’s called Ron del Barrilito Tres Estrellas.

Strip malls dominate Aguadilla, and it’s common to find a Church’s Chicken, McDonalds, Burger King, and Wendy’s all in the same location (or on either side of the highway). Additionally, the abundance of supermarkets made cooking a frequent option during our stay, which was relaxing, unlike sifting through numerous TripAdvisor reviews to find the “perfect” restaurant.

### *Beaches*

My first taste of the Caribbean took me to what I desired for months in NYC: a beautiful, warm beach. Whichever beach you happen to stop off at, the water is the cleanest, turquoise blue. We stumbled across many beautiful beaches either in Aguadilla or during our trips to neighbor-

ing towns. Here are a few of my favorites:

*Crash Boat Beach, Aguadilla:* From our apartment complex, you can see a jetty strutting out into a vibrant blue piece of the Atlantic. This is Crash Boat Beach. Upon arrival you’re greeted by the aroma of barbecued chicken and fried tostones. Small caravans are lined up on the perimeter of the beach selling everything from children’s beach floaties to piña colodas. As you walk through a scattering of picnic benches and palm trees, you reach the clear sand and soft waves. Locals sit sprinkled on the warm sand and in the blue-green ocean. It’s a small beach, not at all crowded, yet filled with enough people to be merry. It’s one of the calmest beaches I’ve been to and we spent many a day in our week-long trip sitting under cover of an umbrella on Crash Boat Beach. We swam, we baked, and we watched people brave the jump off the old pier into the ocean. I even ventured that jump myself,



*Crash Boat Beach*

once. Our favorite beach on our journey, it's a must if you happen to end up in Aguadilla.

*Domes, Rincon* – Domes beach is one of the two main “surfers beaches” in Rincon. We arrived just after 10 a.m. and already the sun was beating down on our foreheads and bare shoulders.

You could tell right away that the dynamic in Rincon, was much more “cooler” than Aguadilla. Akin to stepping off the train at the Bedford stop in Brooklyn. The parking lot was full, and rightly so. With three meter swells, 20, maybe 30 keen surfers were waiting a few meters out from the wave break. Having grown up in Australia, I've seen my fair share of waiting surfers, but this was crazy, numerous people hitting the same wave, some poor paddlers getting struck on their way in. But the conditions were near perfect and the scene was quite glorious. I wouldn't recommend Rincon for swimming on a day like this. The rocks in the shallows can harbor some spiky sea creatures and when the waves are strong, it might prove a little hard to swim safely. But watching some surfers on some great runs is always thrilling.

*Pozo Teodoro, Isabella:* A day trip to Isabella, a neighboring town east of Aguadilla, brought us to a beach experience completely different to that in Rincon or Aguadilla. After a brief stop at what seemed to be a karaoke bar playing old Caribbean hits for its patrons living the sunset of their lives, we made it to Pozo Teodoro.

The sand was hot. There was no shady spot—an umbrella and flip-flops for trudging through the sand are a must for this beach. This end of the Isabella coastline is guarded safely from the pounding waves by a rocky interface forming a little bay. The waves are quite calm within the confines of the rocks and the shallowness of the water extends quite far from the shoreline. The eastern most point of this little beach, near the rocky interface harbors a stretch of rock-pools. This area is even more enclosed from the waves. Every now and then you hear a giant crash against the rocks as a flush of foamy seawater floods over the rock pools into a shallow body of water. It's here next to the wave crash where children sit and play in two foot deep water, watching pinky-sized schools of fish swim by. The water is so warm and, it was remarkably peaceful hearing the bang of the waves and feeling the flurry

of water sweep over your body as children around you giggle with excitement.

We only explored the Western beaches of Puerto Rico. You only have so much in just one week to see what you can. But I promise you, these beaches will not disappoint, regardless of your reason for hitting the surf.

#### *Old San Juan, San Juan*

It takes two to three hours, depending on traffic, to drive from Aguadilla to San Juan. Tolls litter the drive as much as hammock stands on the side of the road. We didn't really know what to expect but the tiny amount of research revealed colorful colonial-style buildings and cats. We drove into the old town on a Sunday afternoon and were a little worried about finding some decent parking. Fortunately, we came across some local men who ushered us into a spot opposite a large government building. We were a little apprehensive at accepting their services, but luckily my better half has a bit more courage. We paid the men \$5 and went on our way to explore the old city. Within five minutes we were there. The buildings are painted in pastel colors, with contrasting window edges and doors. The cobbled streets are well maintained and in some parts had a bluish glow to them. You could definitely feel a heavy police presence in the city and we were told later that there is a bit of a crime problem in San Juan, though we never felt it. The old city is filled with various shops, cafés, restaurants, and bars. We easily explored all parts of the town, walking past the fort, through the shaded arts district, and around many more areas in just a couple of hours. Though I do love the beach, it was nice walking in a lively town. With our stomachs grumbling, we consulted TripAdvisor for some food options and came across a gem of a restaurant, The Mezzanine at St. Germaine. With most restaurants closed during the switch from lunch to dinner at five p.m., we were led to The Mezzanine, located on 156 Sol Street, Old San Juan. It was a cocktail bar, which served a variety of sandwiches and tapas. We started off with their signature cocktails, a basil mojito and a rum old fashioned. We both agreed the basil mojito was one of, if not, the best mojito either of us have ever had. All the flavors were blended so nicely together, and the pineapple juice added a freshness to the drink that I'd like to recreate at home. I highly recommend

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this drink if ever you happen by The Mezzanine. The food was just as great. The ingredients were fresh and the portions were good. The Mezzanine was one of our best dining experiences in Puerto Rico. After one last cocktail, a Moscow mule, we headed back west. It would have been nice to stay a night or two in San Juan, but there's always next time.

#### *El Yunque:*

We had high expectations of conquering a decent hike in El Yunque, but we were a little ill-prepared with time. The national forest is located about one hour away from San Juan and closes at six p.m. on the dot. We left ourselves enough time for the shortest hike available, which is a 40 minute hike to the tower, Mt. Britton. It was a relatively easy hike, the trail paved all the way. There was nothing too impressive along the trek. Rainforests can have a certain effect on you, but this wasn't the case here, it felt too safe to be wild. The mild disappointment we may have felt on our short hike was quelled as we reached the top. As you span the tower, you see nothing but mountains of jungle and perfectly shaped clouds. The view was stunning and well worth our little hike. Next time, we'll conquer one of the other five known trails and immerse ourselves for a full day in the rainforest. It felt nice to be surrounded by so much green. Though our stop at El Yunque was brief, it was another great experience in Puerto Rico.

So there you have it. A brief look at what you can see and do in Puerto Rico in seven days. Don't forget to pack sunscreen and you'll be just fine. ☺

# Take Me Out to the Ball Game

AILEEN MARSHALL

It's springtime in New York, and that means the start of baseball season. There is still hope in the air for the Mets, and great expectations for the Yankees, the two New York teams.

Baseball is known as the "Great American Game," illustrated by a commercial from about 30 years ago, which ran with the tagline "baseball, hot dogs, apple pie, and Chevrolet." It is unclear exactly how American the game is. For many years it was a common belief that Abner Doubleday invented baseball in 1839 in Cooperstown, NY. The belief comes from the Mills commission, a 1905 report by the National League. This was the basis for the location of the Baseball Hall of Fame. In recent years it has become known that this origin is a myth. Abner Doubleday was a Civil War general, but he was a cadet at West Point in 1839, and his family had moved from Cooperstown the year before. When he died, he left many papers and letters, none of which even mentioned baseball.

It is not clear where the modern game of baseball actually started. There are references to a "base ball" and a "bat and ball" game in both British and American writings as early as the 1700s. There is a picture and a description of "base ball" in a children's book published in England in 1744. It probably evolved from the British game, rounders. Baseball is also somewhat similar to cricket. Now, the Great American Game has become popular in the Caribbean, South America, Japan, and Taiwan.

Baseball is played on a field made up of four bases arranged in a diamond pattern. A player on the offensive (batting) team comes up to bat at home plate. A pitcher on the mound in the middle of the diamond throws the ball to the batter. The batter attempts to hit the ball far enough so that he can get to the first base without a player on the defensive (fielding) team catching the ball before it hits the ground, or tagging him with the ball before he reaches the base. Then he is safe. If he hits the ball far enough, or if the fielding team fails to catch the ball or tag him, he can run to as many bases as possible. If he manages to go around to all three bases and back to home plate on one hit, that is a home run. Once any player reaches home base safely, a point is scored. If the batter swings at a ball that was hittable and misses, that is a strike. When a batter gets three strikes, he is out. The next players keep coming up to bat until there are three outs, then the teams switch sides. When the other team gets three outs, that is the end of the inning. When the first team, the visitors, is up at bat, it is called the top of the inning. When the home team is up at bat, it's known as the bottom. The game is played until nine innings, or if the score is tied in the bottom of the ninth, until the tie is broken.

The World Series officially started in 1903, although there were other championships before then. The owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates, the champion that year of the well-established National League, agreed to play the Boston Pilgrims, of the newly formed American League, in a best of nine series. A pitcher named Cy Young helped Boston win that first championship. The next year the owner of the New York Giants refused to play Boston, seeing the American League as inferior and citing a lack of consistency in the rules between the two

leagues. By the next year the two leagues had resolved their differences, and the tradition of the World Series was born.

The World Series is now a best-of-seven game event, with a 2-3-2 schedule, established by Charles Ebbets in 1924. Two games at one team's stadium, three games at the other team's location, and then back to the first team's ballpark if necessary. The locations of the first games of the World Series are determined by the All Star Game, in the middle of the regular season. Whichever league wins that game gets to start the World Series in their home ballpark.

The history of the World Series can be divided into two eras: the pre-Yankee era, 1903-1920, and the Yankee era, starting in 1921. The New York Yankees have played in 40 of 103 World Series played, and won 27. While the Boston Red Sox, the Chicago White Sox, and the Chicago Cubs dominated until 1920, the Red Sox did not win again until 2004. Some say it was the "Curse of the Bambino" that caused this shift in dominance. Babe Ruth, aka the Bambino, was a very prolific home run hitter for his time, and when he was traded to the Yankees in 1920, the resulting Red Sox losing streak was said to be the team's punishment for trading him.

In 1915, Woodrow Wilson was the first president to appear at a World Series game. In 1919, the famous "Black Sox" scandal occurred. Some players on the Chicago White Sox plotted to throw the Series for money, including Shoeless Joe Jackson. After an investigation, those players were suspended, and the White Sox would not win a Series again until 2005. The position of baseball commissioner was established after that to help look after the standards of the game. The two leagues, the National and the American, reorganized in 1969. Since then, Major League Baseball (MLB) has been in charge of the rules and regulations for both leagues.

The World Series has been played every year since 1905 except for 1994, during the players' strike. The commissioner at the time, Bud Selig, was also a team owner and thus an interested party. That season began with an expired collective bargaining agreement, and in August the players went on strike. By September, with no agreement in place, Selig canceled the rest of that season.

Of course, New Yorkers have bragging rights. Over the history of the series, teams from New York (Yankees, Giants, Dodgers, and Mets) have had 65 World Series appearances, and won 34. A New York team won every series from 1949 to 1956. The Chicago Cubs, on the other hand, have not won the championship since 1908.

New this year are the expanded replay rules. Major league baseball traditionally went with the umpires' call, and didn't use reviews of instant video replays. However, in recent years, with the media coverage of controversial calls and the new technology available, the league has begun implementing this practice. Instant replay in the majors actually started in 2008. It was used seven times during that season. The rules at the time allowed instant replay to be used to review boundary home run calls to determine: fair (home run) or foul, whether the ball actually left the playing field, or whether the ball was subject to

spectator interference. Reviews are done by MLB headquarters in New York City, which makes the final ruling.

Instant replay will increase this year to include fair and foul calls and balls that are caught, or trapped by the player catching the ball. It will also expand interference reviews beyond the home run boundary to all walls. It also includes ground rule doubles (when the ball hits the ground before leaving the field), force plays at all bases (because another runner is advancing), tag plays on the base paths, time plays (whether or not a run scored prior to the third out), scorekeeping issues, including

the count, number of outs, scores or substitutions. The MLB is also expanding its video review process for the 2014 season, granting managers one challenge over the first six innings of games. They are awarded a second challenge if they win the first one. The chief umpires are allowed to review a call at any time in the game.

So, now armed with these baseball “CliffsNotes,” the conversations around the coffee pot in the mornings should seem less foreign. When you see your colleagues cheering around the television in the Faculty Club, stop and watch a while. ◉

## Culture Corner

### Book Review: *Seiobo There Below* by László Krasznahorkai (translated by Otilie Mulzet)

BERNIE LANGS

I would bet that it is safe to say that anyone reading these pages is more than busy in this life and that many of you who continue to read for pleasure are overwhelmed by the truth that there are “so many books and so little time.” You may also feel, as I do, that at this point, if I’m going to commit to a book that is both challenging and difficult, it sure as hell better be worth the effort. Keeping this in mind, I have found such incredible joy in chancing upon the works of the Hungarian author László Krasznahorkai (b. 1954). I have had the pleasure of reading three of his works of fiction. Last year in *Natural Selections* I reviewed his book *The Melancholy of Resistance* and interviewed its translator. Subsequently, I completed his *War & War*, a book so powerful that I would read it in dumbfounded awe, and recently I have just finished his *Seiobo Down Below*.

*Seiobo* resembles *Melancholy* and *War* in having very few paragraphs and outdoes the lengthy sentences of the latter two works by having ideas that often stretch across pages until one reaches through the rush of powerful thoughts and images to arrive at the often yearned for a period and rest. When I had finished just a quarter of this book, I found myself fighting a solipsistic view that *Seiobo* had been written just for me. This is because the book is really a thematically unified series of short stories, many of which toggle between tales of experiencing Italian Renaissance painters and paintings either as a modern viewer or by peering into a master’s workshop, and stories reflecting the exciting deep mysticism and mystery of Japanese culture. These are two subjects that have consumed me for years. For example, I once considered writing a play about the appearance of the young Raphael arriving in the workshop of the painter Perugino and how it affected the balance of the other young painters in the studio. I now find Krasznahorkai delving into this and other matters of Perugino’s assistants in the chapter “Il Ritorno in Perugia” with elegant prose, and detailed descriptions of Renaissance life, full of powerful emotional depth and beauty.

There are chapters in *Seiobo* that subtly focus on the theme of an all-consuming responsibility and the necessity of an unquestioned respect for tradition, religion, and art in Japan. These tales, such as “The Preservation of the Buddha” and “The Rebuilding

of the Ise Shrine,” along with other Japanese-focused stories such as “The Life and Work of Master Inoue Kazuyuki,” “He Rises at Dawn,” and “Ze’ami Is Leaving” give shape to the murky and not completely formed ideas that have resonated in me for years on subjects such as the roots of an artist’s deep-seated passion and drive, and the unknowable, complex mystery of Eastern mores, which cannot be truly conceived of but only hinted about for the Western mind.

Nothing is simple in the worlds on display in *Seiobo There Below*. The stories that focus on modern art lovers and viewers in museums, or, in one case, of the Acropolis in Athens, face life-changing moments of power and force. For years I have struggled to explain the depth of what it is like to experience the consuming hold that Renaissance painting can have on an individual, neither religiously nor aesthetically one as well. Krasznahorkai cuts to the chase on these ideas in his story “Christo Morto,” about a visitor who desires to see the famous paintings by Tintoretto on display at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice. Much like the man in the story, I went there quite alone as a tourist when I visited that museum thirty years ago and remember myself as equally as hapless. Within this story Krasznahorkai does not blink when delving into some of the more terrifying notions of why these works of art are literally “alive” in some ways and how that can devastate the art lover at the times when they least expect it.

What I appreciated most from *Seiobo There Below* is its multitude of approaches to the ideas of art in society, of what it means to be consumed by art either through the eyes of the artists themselves or the beholders, and the way he expresses the obsession with all of this, as reflected by the long, seemingly endless sentences and paragraphs reflecting a mind that is so passionately overwhelmed by thought, beauty, and even pain, to take a rest. The mournful endings of some of these stories are truly inevitable, but I was left greatly disturbed by the last pages of the final chapter, where the idea of buried ancient Chinese artifacts are extrapolated in disturbing fashion to mirror our own fragile and very temporary existences. I had hoped for a more uplifting finish, but Krasznahorkai’s brutal honesty and perception just won’t let it be. ◉



## New York State of Mind

To celebrate his retirement, this Month Natural Selections reprints an interview with Patrick Griffin, former Manager of the Faculty and Student Club. Country of origin: Ireland. The original interview was published in the April 2009 issue.

**How long have you been living in New York?** 50 years

**Where do you live?** Bronx

**Which is your favorite neighborhood?** Woodlawn, Bronx.

**What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated?** Tavern on the Green Restaurant is the most overrated thing in the city. NYC Transit System is the most underrated.

**What do you miss most when you are out of town?** Convenience of the transportation system.

**If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be?** Traffic congestion.

**Describe a perfect weekend in NYC.** Staying at the Regency Hotel; eating at top rated restaurants; visit museums and dancing at the Regency Ballroom in the evening.

**What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC?** Closing a bar one summer night. My last two customers were leaving. As I got to the door to let them out, they put a pistol at each of my temples and robbed me. Before they left, they handcuffed me to a steam pipe, with regular police handcuffs. Somehow I was able to break loose and call the police.



**If you could live anywhere else, where would that be?** Ireland.

**Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker? Why?** Yes, because I think NYC is the greatest city in the world. ☺

## For Your Consideration – Cannes Preview Edition

JIM KELLER

Now in its third year, this installment of For Your Consideration takes a look at those films set to cross the Croisette this month. While the Cannes Film Festival is not primarily known as an Oscar launching vehicle, in recent years it has revealed a glimmer of Oscar's gold. Last year's fest premiered eventual Best Picture nominee *Nebraska*, as well as critic's darling *Inside Llewyn Davis*, which only earned cinematography and sound mixing nominations. While details were slim, both films were discussed in this column. This year Jury President and director/producer/screenwriter Jane Campion, will oversee the bow of Olivier Dahan's *Grace of Monaco*, which will open the Festival and screen out of competition.

So let's see what lies across the sea, ready to seize the hearts and minds of the attendees of this film industry exclusive and possibly jump-start the 2014 Oscar race. As always, my list is comprised of highlights and films with considerable pedigree behind them, to wind up in the

throes of Oscar come February:

***Grace of Monaco*** (director: Olivier Dahan):

The film chronicles the life of former Hollywood star Grace Kelly set against a heated political dispute between Monaco's Prince Rainier III and France's Charles De Gaulle, while a French invasion of Monaco looms in the early 1960s.

**For Your Consideration (FYC):** Dahan is perhaps best known for 2007's *La Vie en Rose*, a biopic of Edith Piaf, which won Marion Cotillard the Best Actress Oscar for her portrayal of the renowned French chanteuse. His new film stars Nicole Kidman, who was nominated for Best Actress in 2001 for *Moulin Rouge!* and won the Award in 2003 for *The Hours*. Following her win, Kidman's career consisted of a hybrid of art house projects (*Birth*, *Margot at the Wedding*) and high profile duds (*Australia*, *The Golden Compass*). That changed in 2010 when she was nominated again in the category for *Rabbit Hole*.

Oscar loves a good biopic and if well-received, both Dahan and Kidman could find some footing.

***Foxcatcher*** (director: Bennett Miller):

This drama tells the true story behind the 1996 murder of Olympic wrestler David Schultz by paranoid schizophrenic and heir to the du Pont chemical fortune, John du Pont.

**FYC:** Miller first curried favor with the Academy in 2006 when he won the Best Director Oscar for *Capote*. While he went on to direct *Moneyball*, which earned six nominations in 2012, including Best Picture and Best Actor for Brad Pitt, Miller was hedged out of a director nomination by the competition. Besides the obvious points of Steve Carell playing against type and "getting ugly" for the role of du Pont by donning a prosthetic nose, the film will presumably tackle the relationship between the brothers Mark and David Schultz—both freestyle wrestling gold medalists, which all plays into the Acad-

emy wheelhouse. Mark Ruffalo, who plays Mark, earned a Supporting Actor nomination for *The Kids Are Alright* in 2011 and since then, has remained a fixture in the Hollywood community. Further, Channing Tatum has said that playing the role of David has been “the hardest acting challenge I’ve had to date,” so it will be interesting to see how meaty his role is and whether or not he can quiet the screaming fans obsessed with his body and deliver the goods.

**The Search** (director: Michel Hazavanicius):

Set during the aftermath of the Chechen war, the film recounts a young boy’s plight to reunite with his mother, with the help of an aid worker. It is loosely based on Fred Zinnemann’s 1948 WWII tearjerker of the same name.

**FYC:** Hazavanicius directed 2012 Best Picture winner, *The Artist*, and the Academy took him and the lead actor, Jean Dujardin, along for the ride by bestowing both men with Oscars in their respective categories. Interestingly enough, supporting actress nominee for the film, Bérénice Bejo stars in Hazavanicius’ latest as the non-governmental organization (NGO)-worker who connects with the young boy. Four-time Oscar nominee Annette Bening also inhabits a supporting role and depending on the role, could be one to look out for. Given that Zinnemann’s original won the now-defunct Juvenile Award and Best Writing, Motion Picture Story Oscars and earned Best Actor, Screenplay, and Director nominations, it isn’t inconceivable that Hazavanicius’ film could yield a similar trove.

**Maps to the Stars** (director: David Cronenberg):

The film depicts the plight of two former child-stars and looks at the entertainment industry’s complex relationship with the whole of Western civilization.

**FYC:** Cronenberg’s name is not one immediately thought of when it comes to the Academy and rightfully so—despite having made forty films, neither the director nor any of his film’s parts have earned Oscar nominations. So why discuss the auteur in this column? The answer is simple: I hope for change. In this context, change means what is Academy junk today is Academy gold tomorrow. There is no denying the public’s obsession with ce-

lebrity. On any given night, one can flip through TV channels and find a plethora of celebrity-based reality programs. Add this to Hollywood’s known self-interest (see *The Artist* above) and you have a quick recipe for a Best Picture contender. Ok, so it’s not that easy where Cronenberg is concerned, but you catch my drift. While the trailer reveals a sultry Julianne Moore and a brooding Mia Wasikowska, I would be remiss to try to discuss the depth of their respective roles. Instead, I’ll say that Moore plays an aging actress who hires Wasikowska’s Agatha to work as her assistant, seemingly unaware of her former Hollywood ties. Moore has been nominated for Oscar four times, beginning with 1997’s *Boogie Nights* and most recently in 2002’s *Far From Heaven*. Wasikowska has yet to be nominated, but consistently delivers in varying roles, which could eventually lead to a nomination.

**The Homesman** (director: Tommy Lee Jones):

The film centers on a claim jumper and a pioneer woman who team up to escort three insane women from Nebraska to Iowa.

**FYC:** This adaptation of Glendon Swarthout’s 1988 novel of the same name marks the return of Jones to the director’s chair after his debut feature film 2005’s *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*. Not having a lot of directing experience (outside of the feature film he has directed two made-for-TV movies) leaves me feeling suspect about his Oscar chances, though anything is possible. It is for this reason that I concentrate more on his abilities as an actor here since he also stars in the film. Jones was first nominated for Best Supporting Actor in 1992 for *JFK*: two years later he won in the category for his role in *The Fugitive*. He earned his only lead actor nomination in 2008 for *In the Valley of Elah* and was last nominated for his supporting role in 2011 for *Lincoln*. Based on the trailer, Hilary Swank seems to have the bigger role as lone pioneer woman, Mary Bee Cuddy. Swank is no Academy stranger, having won her first of two Best Actress Oscars in 2000 for *Boys Don’t Cry* and her second in 2005 for *Million Dollar Baby*. Because of this, Swank is considered one of the most Oscar-baiting working actresses in Hollywood. The trouble is, when a film that she stars in fails to impress critics, it hurts her

reputation in their eyes (see 2009’s *Amelia* and 2010’s *Conviction*). Meryl Streep also features in what appears to be a smaller role, as does her daughter, Grace Gummer as one of the lugubrious women—the other two are played by Miranda Otto and Hailee Steinfeld. It’s worth mentioning that Steinfeld was nominated for Best Supporting Actress for what was really a lead role in the 2010 *True Grit* remake. Perhaps one of the lesser roles can strike a flame with critics? After all, Beatrice Straight won a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for *Network* in 1976 after appearing on-screen for only five minutes and two seconds.

As I mentioned at the top, Cannes isn’t primarily an Oscar hunting ground. The Un Certain Regard category recognizes young talent and encourages innovative, daring works by presenting the recipient with a grant to aid his or her film’s distribution in France. This year’s selection opens with *Party Girl*, a collaborative effort from Marie Amachoukeli-Barsacq, Claire Berger and Samuel Theis, which concerns an aging nightclub hostess who decides to settle down and get married. Also appearing will be two feature film debuts: *The Blue Room* from French actor Mathieu Almaric and *Lost River* from Ryan Gosling. The latter stars Saoirse Ronan, Christina Hendricks, and Eva Mendes.

Screening out of competition this year will be Yimou Zhang’s *Coming Home* and Dean DeBlois’ animated follow-up *How to Train Your Dragon 2*. The festival will also celebrate the 70th Anniversary of French newspaper, *Le Monde*.

Other films to screen include: David Michod’s follow-up to 2010’s *Animal Kingdom*, *The Rover*; Mike Leigh’s long-gestating biopic of British artist J.M.W. Turner, *Mr. Turner*; Andrei Zvyagintsev’s *Leviathan*; Xavier Dolan’s *Mommy*, and Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne’s Marion Cotillard starrer *Two Days, One Night*.

This year’s closing night film has yet to be announced.

The narrative of this year is already being built as the organizers saw fit to pack the docket with many female-directed films—most likely in response to criticism of previous festivals’ lack of female presence. For now, we wait patiently to see if any of Cannes’ Official Selection find themselves in the Oscar conversation. The winners will be announced on May 25! ◊

# Mistaken for Strangers—A Rock Star’s Brother Peeks Out of His Shadow

JASON ROTHAUER

In the film’s opening sequence, Matt Berninger, nattily dressed in a three-piece suit, fusses with a beach umbrella before finally settling down for an interview in the park. Berninger is the lead singer of The National, an indie rock band who toiled for years in obscurity before making it into the spotlight and to the top of the Billboard charts. His interviewer is his brother Tom. He starts with a few odd questions (“Do you ever get sleepy on stage?”). Things are not going well.

“Do you have a notebook?” Matt asks his brother. “With questions written down? Do you have any kind of organization and plan for this film?”

Thus begins *Mistaken for Strangers*, a documentary that began as a behind-the-scenes look at The National before morphing into something very different. The filmmaker is Matt’s brother Tom. While Matt has reached rock stardom as the lead singer of one of the most successful indie rock bands, Tom still lives at home with his parents in Ohio. Matt is tall, thin, composed. Tom is overweight, disheveled, and an amateur filmmaker whose efforts have been limited to zombie schlock-fests on homemade VHS tapes.

When Matt invites his brother to join their European tour as a working roadie, Tom jumps at the chance, and takes along a handheld video camera. He keeps it rolling for much of the tour. At first, Tom’s only ambition is to perhaps produce some documentary footage for the web, but he soon latches onto the idea of creating a full-length feature film.

While *Mistaken for Strangers* does in fact feature plenty of backstage footage of the band as they tour Europe, this is not a concert documentary or even a documentary ultimately about The National. It quickly becomes clear that Tom doesn’t know what he’s doing, either as a roadie or as a filmmaker. Tom, decked out in plastic sandals, Motörhead t-shirt, and ubiquitous drink in hand, is ready for a party. He’s expecting rock-star debauchery, but he’s quickly brought down to earth by the business-like efficiency of the consistently professional band. His drinking becomes a problem (“Remember your allergy!” brother Matt scolds as he grabs a beer out of Tom’s hand), and it’s only a matter of time before Tom is fired. He keeps the camera rolling for his painful exit interview.

But the story doesn’t end there. Instead, Tom turns the camera, and the focus of the film, on himself. How does it feel to live in the shadow of the limelight? To live in your parents’ garage while your big brother becomes a rock star?

Tom’s stint as a roadie shoves this disparity right in his face, and he lives out every painful bit of it on camera with unflinching (and endearing) honesty. A highlight moment features the band playing for President Obama (their song “Fake Empire” was a campaign theme and the band has played at various campaign rallies). Tom is corralled backstage by Secret Service agents while the rest of the band meets and has a photo taken with the president. Tom is crushed that he’s not includ-

ed. “Do you think its because of my DUI?” he wonders.

Ironically, Tom’s failures elevate what could have been a routine concert documentary into something much more. And while the film has something serious to say about ambition, family, and failure, there is never any danger of it taking itself too seriously. The filmmaker’s entirely guileless personality and bizarre questions replicate the absurdity of *This is Spinal Tap*, and Tom even manages to ask some questions that music fans might be curious about, but thought were too dumb to ask. “Do you carry your wallet when you’re up there performing?” he asks the band’s bass player. The answer is “yes.”

Documentary filmmaking is full of happy accidents. The brilliant *Capturing the Friedmans*, which examines a sensational case of child abuse and its effects on the titular family, had its origins in a documentary about children’s entertainers (family member David Friedman is a professional clown, and the filmmaker came to learn his story when getting to know him in that capacity). *Mistaken for Strangers* similarly rises from relatively humdrum origins to add up to something much more than its original ambitions. You don’t have to be a fan of The National, or even know who they are, to be profoundly entertained by this warm, human film. And if you happen to be an underachieving younger sibling, photos of a smiling Tom Berninger presenting his (much-lauded) movie at the Tribeca festival may just give you some hope. ◉

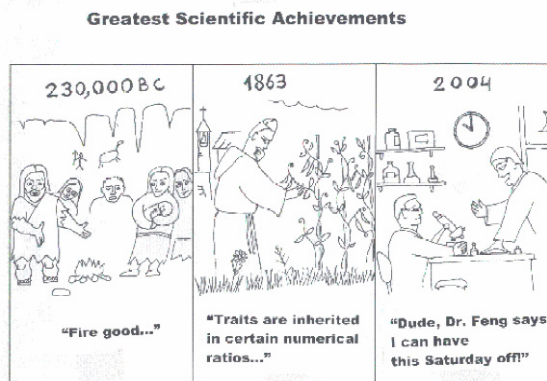
## Ten Years of Natural Selections

DANIEL BRISKIN

Continuing on with our salute to the tenth anniversary of Natural Selections, here are two comics republished from 2004. ◉



By Sean Taverna

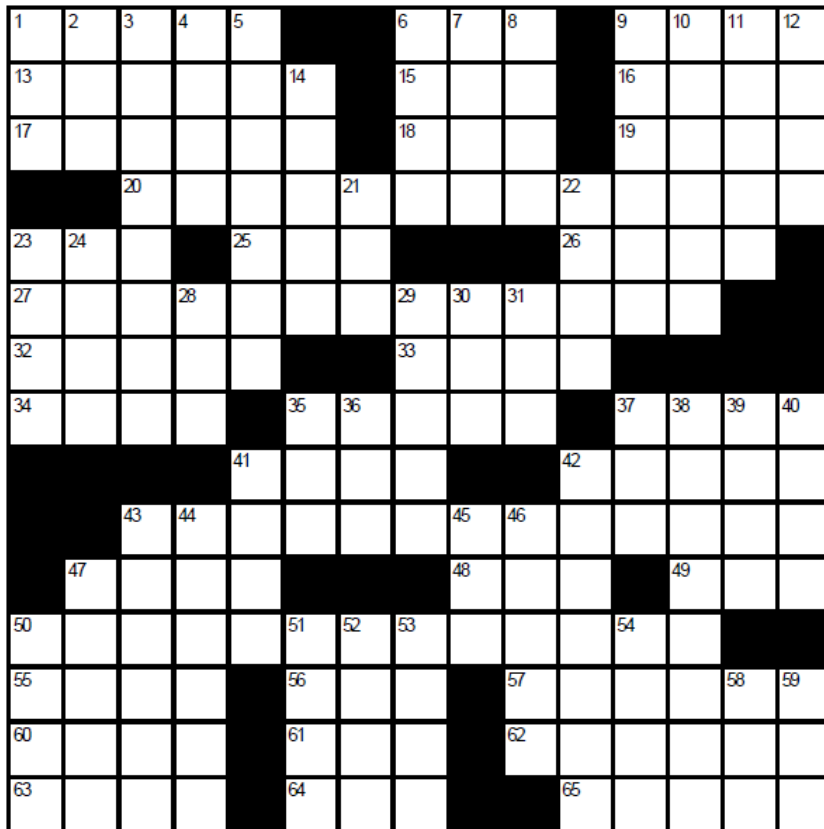


By Mitchell Thorn

# Sea Change

MICHAEL HANKO AND GEORGE BARANY

MH is a NYC voice teacher, writer, and performer; GB is a Rockefeller alum (1977). For more puzzles and for the solution to this month's puzzle, visit <http://tinyurl.com/gbpuzzle>



## Across

1. Flagrant disregard of the law
6. What may accompany shock
9. Give a hoot
13. Honker
15. Bunk
16. What 23-Across and 24-Down share
17. Buffy \_\_\_\_-Marie
18. Quip
19. Succeed in obtaining a role or a roughy
20. Team of terrible teachers?
23. L.A. setting starting Sun, 3/9/14 OR L.A. setting until Sun, 11/2/14
25. 2016 Olympics host
26. "Famous" cookie maker
27. Partial to popsicles and postage?
32. States
33. Hard cash
34. Votes against
35. With "The," Dostoyevsky novel on which "Breakfast at Tiffany's" was loosely based
37. Word that ironically originally signi-

- fied "of lower status"
41. Wield a gun in art class
42. Stiller's spouse and comedic partner
43. Friends' farmyard fowl?
47. Brünnhilde's relationship to Siegfried in Wagner's "Ring Cycle"
48. B-ball rivals of the Citadel
49. Is in France?
50. Split in stimulated spirits?
55. Mega's opposite
56. "I find this delectable"
57. Citizen's follower in law enforcement?
60. Swung weapon or sprayed weapon
61. Product whose 2011 ads featured the image of Chuck Norris
62. Like Obama, according to some unreliable detractors
63. Lager alternatives
64. How many it takes to tango in Spain?
65. "... for thou that judgest \_\_\_\_ the same things." I

## Down

1. Per Dickens's Mr. Bumble, "the law is a \_\_\_\_"
2. Their Red Seal label issued 78-rpm discs of Caruso and Chaliapin
3. Its overuse may be a capital offense
4. \_\_\_\_ Ehrlich, designer whose totes have been touted by Oprah
5. Feature of drag racing
6. Word before surplus or after salvation
7. Sound like Beethoven?
8. Jazzy James
9. The Washington Monument, essentially
10. Digital counterpart
11. Doesn't own
12. Whirlpool
14. Allen's title chameleon
21. "My mama done \_\_\_\_ me"
22. Tea Party contender for the Republican presidential nomination of 2012
23. Aim
24. Conceited contralto, perhaps
28. Org. that receives many unhappy returns?
29. More hazardous to drivers, perhaps
30. Bill's partner in love
31. Future vixen
35. Kind
36. Expected
37. "Wait a \_\_\_\_!"
38. Primitive astronomical equipment
39. Galena and Cinnabar, e.g.
40. Nephew of Patty and Selma
41. Suffix signifying scandal
42. Chef's counterpart outside the kitchen
43. Fruit eaten by the Owl and the Pussycat with a runcible spoon
44. Releases from bondage
45. TV retailer
46. Eskimo boat
47. Skeleton part to which appendages attach
50. Jane Austen novel that inspired "Clueless"
51. Like red pistachios
52. French bread
53. Present time, briefly
54. Sarcastic demurral
58. Carrier of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark
59. Acme's go-to explosive

