An Extraordinary Early American in Europe

Susan Russo

Ira Aldridge was born in New York in 1807 to free black parents: Daniel, a clerk and preacher, and Luranah Aldridge. Ira was schooled at home until 1820, when, at the age of 13, he was enrolled in the African Free School Number Two. In the 1820s in New York City William Alexander Brown, a West Indian, started four “backyard” or public garden theatres, with plays followed by musical entertainments. During the same period, Brown founded the first all-black “African Grove Theatre,” presenting Richard III, followed by an opera and a ballet. City officials closed all of Brown’s and others’ similar enterprises shortly after each opening following complaints, the last closing culminating in a riot.

At 14, Aldridge found a job in New York as a dresser at the whites-only Chatham Garden Theatre. His employer was a touring Anglo-American actor, James William Wallack. It is not known whether the connection with Wallack played a part in his decision, but, in 1824, Aldridge embarked for Liverpool, England, on his way to accept the award of a scholarship to study theology at Glasgow University. (During this period, a number of religious institutions and anti-slavery societies in England, Scotland, and America were active in supporting advanced education, but in limited subjects, for Africans and African-Americans.)

In 1825 Aldridge left the university for a chance in the theater, making his debut in England at the East London Royalty Theatre, not in a small part, but playing Othello to Edmund Kean’s Iago. Aldridge was asked to play Othello and received great audience applause, but the critics were universally condescending and outright insulting, with comments that were clearly racially motivated. The management of the theatre closed the production, and Aldridge did not appear in London again for 27 years. London, however, seemed to be the only place where Aldridge was not welcomed and applauded. He continued to perform throughout the rest of the British Isles for the following two decades. In 1852, he widened his touring through France, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Serbia, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Switzerland, and Holland.

A Russian critic, S. Almazov, wrote, “Aldridge had nothing in common with those theatrical personalities from the West who visited us in recent times…he concentrates all your attention only on the inner meaning of the speech…moves about completely naturally, not like a tragedian but like a human being…[he shows] a highly truthful understanding of art, a deep knowledge of the human heart….” Finally, in London in 1857 and 1858, he returned triumphant. An observer reported, “The audience, with one impulse rose to its feet amid the wildest enthusiasm… ‘Othello’ was called before the curtain and received the applause of the delighted multitude.”

Aldridge was awarded many honors worldwide: in Haiti, Commission in the Army of Haiti; in Ireland, Brother Mason of the Grand Lodge, and Brother of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter; in Austria, the Gold Medal of the First Class for Art and Science, the Medal of Ferdinand, and the Grand Cross of the Order of Leopold presented by the emperor himself; in Hungary, Honorary Member of the Hungarian Dramatic Conservatoire; in Switzerland, the White Cross; in Saxony, from the Royal Saxon House of Order, he became Chevalier Ira Aldridge, Knight of Saxony; and in Russia, Honorary Member of the Imperial Academy of Beaux Arts St. Petersburg, and the Imperial Jubilee de
Tolstoy Medal; and finally, in England, in 1863, British citizenship.

Ira Aldridge died in Lodz, Poland, in 1867 and was given a Polish state funeral. Despite his worldwide fame, Aldridge was virtually unknown in America. Neither Ira Aldridge’s parents, nor America, ever saw his victorious performances. In New York City, the only permanent acknowledgement of Ira Aldridge is a bust in the Schomburg Center for Black Culture, a branch of the New York Public Library. In 1932, Ira Aldridge was honored with a plaque at the Memorial Theatre in Stratford-on-Avon in England.

Ira Aldridge’s children continued his legacy in the arts. His daughter Irene Luranah became an opera singer in Europe. Ira Frederick became a musician and composer. Amanda Christina became an opera singer, teacher, and composer in England (under the male pseudonym Montague Ring), giving elocution lessons to Paul Robeson in 1930 before Robeson’s first performance as Othello in London. She later was a singing teacher to Marian Andersen, Paul Robeson, and others. At the age of 88, Amanda appeared on British television in a program entitled “Music for You,” and died in 1956.

World Cup 2014: Enough Info to Get By in Conversation

Brianna Caszatt & A Gerald Martini, football masterminds

Temperatures are rising and flowers are in bloom: summer is practically here. And for one month this summer, people around the globe will be riveted to their screens watching all the drama unfold in Brazil at the 2014 World Cup—the football (yes football, but soccer if you must) tournament that 32 countries have spent the last three years qualifying for. Remember how excited you were to watch the Olympics? Well double it, and that’s how the rest of the world feels. But if you can’t muster that much enthusiasm, this handy guide we’ve created should at least help you keep up with all the cool kids watching. So muddle some limes for a month’s worth of caipirinhas and grab your contraband caxirola, Brazil’s noise-making answer to the vuvuzela (imagine if a rattle and brass knuckles had a baby—they’ve since been banned from the stadiums after being used by fans as missiles), and let’s tuck in.

For those of you who are total World Cup novices, there are eight groups of four teams each. Each country will play all three of the other teams in their group, and the top two teams from each group will advance to the knockout rounds. The top two from the group are determined by awarding three points for a win, one for a draw, and zero for a loss. Google “World Cup 2014 Bracket,” print one out, and make your own predictions!

Group A – Brazil, Cameroon, Croatia, Mexico

Even if there is the potential for off-the-field drama in Brazil this summer, we think Luiz Felipe Scolari is a great coach for the current Brazil team and are excited to watch them. (Gerry: Full disclosure, I may just be saying that because he used to manage the team I support, Chelsea, or because he looks a bit like my late grandfather, or because there are four Chelsea players in the Brazil squad.) They are the host team, have won the most World Cups (five), and are the only country to have qualified for every single World Cup, so it’s safe to say they are one of the favorites to win it all. Mexico can be a really good team on their day, but they don’t always seem to produce at the World Cup, and they limped into this one, having beaten New Zealand in a playoff for one of the final spots in the tournament. We expect them to get a push for that second spot from Cameroon—because Samuel Eto’o loves to score in big tournaments—but they should go through. Sorry Croatia.

Group B – Australia, Chile, Netherlands, Spain

A tough group this, with Australia lucky if they manage a single draw, even, from their three matches. Chile has the po-
Potential to challenge the Netherlands and Spain in this group, but a lot hinges on whether Arturo Vidal (a dominant central midfielder who is recovering from minor knee surgery) will be fully fit. Spain is the reigning World Cup champion (plus European champions two times running), so it is hard to bet against them in either the group or to win the tournament. But the Netherlands has some very talented players, and their wily manager, Louis Van Gaal, has just announced that he is going to play with a new formation—if it works, they could take the top spot from Spain. We still expect those two to go through. (Brianna: Full disclosure, if the trophy were awarded on looks alone, Spain would win before the first whistle.)

Group C – Colombia, Greece, Ivory Coast, Japan

Somehow this is the group without a heavyweight; really, any of these teams could go through. However, Colombia will miss Radamel Falcao if he doesn’t make the first of their three group games (he’s also recovering from knee surgery)—they will need his goals if they are to make it to the knockout stage. We learned in Euro 2004 not to doubt the Greek team, but still think it unlikely that they will progress. For our money, Ivory Coast is the best team in this group; ex-Chelsea great Didier Drogba is on the team, but, most importantly, they have Yaya Toure. He commands the center of the field in a way that no one else in world football does. We will also pick Japan to go through. We don’t get to watch them play very often, but we’re always impressed with their style since they often have a lot of ball possession.

Group D – Costa Rica, England, Italy, Uruguay

This is certainly one of the toughest groups. Costa Rica should be the obvious last place finisher, but England loves to choke in these situations. Even the British government isn’t very confident; one of their own reports estimated that their team only had a 54% chance of advancing to the knockout stages! Uruguay could be the team that takes a spot from them, but they will need to balance their incredible attacking talent with a little defense. Italy should go through because Andrea Pirlo has clearly made a pact with the devil that is starting to pay off. He will be 35 by the time the tournament begins and only looks like he’s getting better with age—he just led his club team, Juventus, to a third straight Serie A title and is perhaps the world’s best passer and free-kick taker.

Group E – Ecuador, France, Honduras, Switzerland

France left one of their best players, Samir Nasri, out of their squad because he is supposedly a pain in the coach’s backside, but they should still have the quality to top this group. The other three teams are going to have to play well against each other—any one of the three could take the second spot. Whoever goes through won’t make it far in the knockout stages. That includes France, who will rue the day they left Nasri at home once they move on to better teams (or so say several ex-greats from past French teams, and we tend to agree with them).

Group F – Argentina, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iran, Nigeria

You just know Argentina’s Lionel Messi is aching to have a great World Cup. After four years running of being voted the best player in world football, he lost the crown this year to Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal, and he will want to remind us all who is really the king. Argentina’s phenomenal attack (though oddly Carlos Tevez has not been chosen) will see them ease through this group, and there are signs that they might be starting to find a bit of defensive balance. If that’s the case, it could make them a threat to win the whole tournament. Edin Dzeko’s current hot-streak in front of goal will mean that Bosnia-Herzegovina gets our pick for the other knockout round–bound team.

Group G – Germany, Ghana, Portugal, United States

Sorry USA fans, but it will be a pretty tough haul for the boys in red, white, and blue to make it past the likes of Germany and Portugal to the next stage of the tournament. Frankly, even Ghana will be a tough game, though the US will at least expect to win that one. But we think if they can take the game to Portugal and cut off the supply chain to Ronaldo (because if the ball gets to him with space for him to run, they’re screwed), they could eke out a win here and advance in second. Germany is the obvious best team in the group and wouldn’t be a bad bet to win the whole thing; if anyone seems likely to overturn Spain’s recent stranglehold on big tournaments, it’s Germany.

Group H – Algeria, Belgium, Russia, South Korea

We think viewers should expect very good things from Belgium this tournament. They should win this group and will be a tough team for anyone to play against. They are especially strong in the central defensive and attacking midfield areas of the park, but quick players along the flanks could undo them in the knockout rounds. We think Algeria could surprise Russia and take second place in the group, though their committed attackers might leave them vulnerable at the back. South Korea had a great tournament when they co-hosted with Japan in 2002 and made it to the knockout round last time around, but I don’t see them being a contender in this group. They could surprise us though—they have a few very good players.

Final Prediction: Argentina and Germany in the final, with Germany for the win.
Culture Corner

The “Exotic Foreign” of Wes Anderson and Haruki Murakami

Bernie Langs

There is much made in some classical and modern philosophies of the concept and ambiguity of what is termed “the other.” In addition, one can find obscure musings on the idea of “the stranger” from the pens of philosophers as far afield in time and thinking as Plato and Camus. I’ve been avoiding, of late, the more difficult works of such trained thinkers and their non-fictions, opting to glean life lessons from those more akin within the arts to current travails. What I continue to discover is that I draw great pleasure from the belief that ideas originating from lands abroad that I will most likely never visit, appeal to my sense of intellectual adventure, offering to me, and perhaps to others, the mystery of the “exotic foreign.”

I offer, by way of example, two works of art extremely different in nature appealing to this sense. Wes Anderson co-wrote and directed the film *The Darjeeling Limited* in 2007 and Haruki Murakami wrote the book “Sputnik Sweetheart” in 2001. In Anderson’s movie, we follow the travels of three brothers on a train through India, a trip they take in an attempt to bond and heal a year after their father’s untimely death. The brothers are played to absolute perfection by the actors Owen Wilson, Adrien Brody, and Jason Schwartzman (Schwartzman has frequently appeared in Anderson’s films and he is also a co-writer of this movie). The viewer identifies with these foreigners since we can relate to the notion of Western individuals seeking spiritual solace in the East as visitors. We discover India as they do, as enlightened tourists hoping to catch a glimpse and some meaning from something new and completely alien to our routines.

In the book by Murakami, we are taken by the author not as visitors of substance to Japan, but almost as voyeurs to a culture that we may or may not ever fully understand. “Sputnik Sweetheart” weaves a tale of one young man and two women dancing in a disturbing, yet touching, circle of broken hearts and unfulfilled love. The narrator, a young school teacher identified as “K” is in love with the impetuous Sumire. She matures as she falls for an older woman named Miu, who hires Sumire and teaches her about responsibility and the world. Much of the action takes place on an obscure Greek island, where Miu and Sumire are on vacation and from which Sumire disappears after feverishly displaying her passion for Miu. K is called in by Miu to help solve the mystery of Sumire’s disappearance, and he finds himself reacting emotionally to the island, and in some ways, falling into the web of an East to West “exotic foreign.”

The only book I’ve read in the past by Murakami is *Kafka On the Shore*, of which I remember little, but I knew (and feared) when I picked up “Sputnik Sweetheart” that at some point Murakami would present ideas and action that would be deeply disturbing. I was introduced to Japanese fiction in the late 1970s by my mother, who just simply started reading the genre and was followed by my brother, my sister, and myself in the pursuit. I’ve read authors such as Mishimi, Kawabata, and Abe, all of whom have the talent of writing of strange passions, obsessions, and, often, odd violence.

The Japan presented by Murakami is a bit different than those writers and what I appreciated more and more as I read “Sputnik Sweetheart” was his grasp and presentation of the concept of modern individual isolation and (though I hate to use the term) alienation. But this isn’t Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*. K’s loneliness, his disengagement and his emptiness, speaks to the reader’s own sense of those feelings, almost as a most welcoming friend. That Murakami can understand the very complex depth of where we are today is a comforting feat. A scientist may see the universe as exciting in its vastness and epic dimensions. A poet, however, and one with a broken heart, experiences the stars as lonely lights reaching out forever, eternally. To put it simply, it’s nice to know that another poet gazing alongside you understands this notion and can display it with such nuance and care.

I have long believed that America is a brand new entity, a fresh beginning, having escaped the tyranny of the political blood and religious zealotry of Old Europe. I also believed that we haven’t exactly found much to replace those complicated ancient fortresses with. There are only so many places a new car from General Motors can take you these days. Murakami explains the emptiness of those in a spiritual diaspora, and of the odd emotions of those who have shed God and religion and are mutated and often defeated by the ensuing void.

On the other hand, Wes Anderson is able to fill the hole of our existence in his film, and he does it beautifully. I may no longer subscribe to classic religious rituals, but I remain in awe of both the wonders of nature and the better works of Man, sensing a hope that there is some kind of inexplicable divine spark in both. I may not believe in the concrete, absolute truths of Christian paintings from the Renaissance or the gods of Hindu mythologies, but I enjoy experiencing what those who believed in them felt in their hearts, since it came from the desire to express the profundity of the spiritual.

In Anderson’s movie, India is displayed with its vibrant and startling colors, especially its deep blues, as well as rich reds and yellows. *Darjeeling* is a wonder of cinematography. From the countryside to the cities, one sits back and looks on in awe, as do the three brothers in the film. Wilson, Brody, and Schwartzman have impeccable and unusual comic timing, but when the film takes a serious turn, they rise to the emotional occasion. The movie peaks when the brothers save two young boys from drowning in a small river, but are unable to save a third. The lesson they learn is spiritual and emotional, and their sibling bickering vanishes. The three are invited to the boy’s funeral by the humble villagers, and the slow-motion scene of them setting out to the ceremony is heart-wrenching. That scene is musically sound-trackred by an obscure song from the 1970 masterpiece album by the Kinks, *Lola Versus Powerman and the Moneygoround, Part One*, called “Strangers.” The song was written and is sung by Dave Davies, the guitarist and brother of the band’s more famous front man and primary composer, Ray Davies. In this film about brothers, I was chilled by the choice of a song at that moment by Dave Davies, and by the fact that my own brother introduced me to the song decades ago. In fact, I recorded a
New York State of Mind

To celebrate 10 years of Natural Selections, this month we are reprinting an interview with Zach Veilleux, Executive Director of Communications and Public Affairs. Country of origin: USA. The original interview was published in the April 2004 issue.

How long have you been living in New York City? I moved to the city in the summer of 2001 from Allentown, Pennsylvania, where I had lived for five years. I needed a change of scenery.

Where do you live? Just off York Avenue on 75th Street.

Which is your favorite neighborhood? It depends. To live in, the Upper West Side, Brooklyn Heights or Battery Park City — I like being near the water. For eating dinner and walking around, I like Tribeca and the West Village. For character, Canal Street. For architectural flavor, the Financial District.

What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated?

Overrated: They call this the city that never sleeps, but it’s hard to find a video store open past midnight, and you can’t get decent sushi later than 10:30 p.m. Underated: The Roosevelt Island Tram. Most people don’t even know it’s there and even those of us who work a few blocks away rarely ride it. Take it at night. It’s the best $2 you can spend in the city.

What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC?

The first night I moved to New York I spent in the Lenox Hill emergency room, waiting four hours to get a tetanus shot after cutting my thumb on a metal fan blade. I made friends with a girl who sprained her ankle. She turned out to be crazy. I hadn’t even lived here 12 hours and I’d had the entire New York experience — danger, perseverance, romance and heartbreak, all of it totally superficial.

If you could live anywhere else, where would that be? I’ve always thought my own tropical island would be nice. Beyond that, I’m not picky.

Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker? Why? I pay the exorbitant rent; as far as I’m concerned, the title comes with it.

I watched The Darjeeling Limited twice in one week and was able to pick up during the second viewing a lot I had missed or not understood the first time around. It is a completely uplifting film about a mystic family journey that is often hilarious and tearful. The hope it offers to the personal and individual journey in life is wondrous and it may truly be a masterpiece of film.

It’s a far cry from Cary Grant’s disruptive whistle in a Hindu temple in the film of Gunga Din based on Kipling’s poem and more in tune with the mysteries of the “traveler of both time and space” seeking “to sit with elders of the gentle race” that Robert Plant sings of in Led Zeppelin’s “Kashmir.” But to keep me honest, I’ll have to revisit Murakami’s books in the future, just to stir things up and question ideas about life and art, and about the cultures of the East.

This month, the Natural Selections Editorial Board bids farewell to Christina Pyrgaki. We would like to thank her for her dedication and for helping Natural Selections to become what it is today.

Christina has been a contributor and editor for Natural Selections for two years. She worked as a postdoc in the Laboratory of Molecular Biology before taking a position with Zeiss. You may recall her interesting discourse on different cultures as her articles were often imbued with a slice of Greek life.

We wish her all the best!
Ten Years of Natural Selections

Continuing on with our salute to the tenth anniversary of Natural Selections, here is a comic republished from 2004.

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Natural Selections, the voice of the Rockefeller University community, is seeking writers of all levels with something to say—whether non-fiction or fiction, the choice is yours! You don’t have to be science-minded to contribute something meaningful to our community.

We welcome submissions from all RU students, staff, and faculty, on ANY topic, and in any form—travel experiences, satire, original photographs and artwork, reviews, your opinions, diatribes—in short, any ideas you may have.

We encourage collaboration between the Rockefeller community and our editors, who are eager to assist in polishing your writing while preserving your views.

Still unsure about submitting? Take the opportunity to step out of the lab and walk on the creative side. You might find that you have more ways to shine than you expected.
Life on a Roll

Bench in the square

On the beach

Building

Walker

All photos contributed by Elodie Pauwels, http://elodiepphoto.wordpress.com
Covert Operations

George Barany and Kurtis Scaletta

GB is a Rockefeller alum (1977) and KS is an author of children’s books. For more puzzles, visit http://tinyurl.com/gbpuzzle. The solution for this specific puzzle is found at http://tinyurl.com/covertoperationsol, and a detailed explanation will be available at the beginning of August.

Across

1. * Weapon hidden in crosswords
2. Spree
3. * Oklahoma hand captures Nebraska native
4. Knock-down, drag-out fight
5. G.I. morale booster
6. Go for a close-up shot
7. Rimes of country music
8. Wild org.
9. Defeated by a whisker
10. Electric generator
11. Hora and hula, for two
12. Nice time in the sun
13. Prankster’s projectile
14. Mysterious tomb I see
15. Babe Ruth’s league-leading stat in 1916
16. Transmission setting
17. George’s brother, the lyricist
18. Japanese cartoon art
19. Affirmative, formally
20. Potpourri
21. Culinary connoisseur
22. Garfunkel’s partner
23. Cry’s partner
24. Preferred option
25. “Back in the ___” (Beatles song)
26. D.D.E.’s command for veto loses victory
27. Crumble rye, minus crust, and stir with purple fruit
28. Place for sweaters?
29. He carried the host nation’s flag at the 2008 Olympics opening ceremony
30. Workout target
31. Affirmative, informally
32. Actor Elliott or pianist Glenn
33. Actor Mineo or pitcher Maglie
34. Affirmative, formally
35. Muddleheaded
36. Hamlet’s father, for one
37. Adjective for many 41-Across
38. One of the Obama girls
39. Fund
40. Hoffmann’s initials
41. They hang out with dweebs
42. Kind of owl or egret
43. Llama land
44. Kind of owl or egret
45. Flotation device
46. Word before top or dog
47. Affirmative, formally
48. Potpourri
49. Culinary connoisseur
50. Garfunkel’s partner
51. Cry’s partner
52. Preferred option
53. "Back in the ___” (Beatles song)
54. Indulges, with “on”
55. Speedwagon creator
56. Wolfish grin
57. Japanese port
58. Roulette bet
59. Sticking point?
60. Get bushed
61. Rubs the wrong way
62. Play group
63. D.D.E.’s command for veto loses victory
64. Small-print nos. in credit card ads
65. Half-month tide
66. Coastal raptor
67. Tabloid topic
68. Roulette bet
69. Fund
70. "Back in the ___” (Beatles song)

Down

1. Ascending sizes, briefly
2. Marijuana, in slang
3. Oil of ___
4. Enzyme used for cheesemaking
5. Cause a protein or nucleic acid to lose secondary and tertiary structure
6. * Northern capital heard Cody’s award-winning screenplay
7. Bat wood
8. Force antique metal
9. On the lookout
10. Zany
11. Cherub, in Cherbourg
12. Makes haste, à la Shakespeare
13. “Your point being...?”
14. "Handwriting on the wall” word
15. Small-print nos. in credit card ads
16. Half-month tide
17. Coastal raptor
18. Tabloid topic
19. Roulette bet
20. Half-moon tide
21. Coastal raptor
22. Tabloid topic
23. Roulette bet
24. Half-moon tide
25. Coastal raptor
26. Tabloid topic
27. Roulette bet
28. Half-moon tide
29. Coastal raptor
30. Tabloid topic
31. Roulette bet
32. Half-moon tide
33. Coastal raptor
34. Tabloid topic
35. Roulette bet
36. Half-moon tide
37. Coastal raptor
38. Tabloid topic
39. Roulette bet
40. Half-moon tide
41. Coastal raptor
42. Tabloid topic
43. Roulette bet
44. Half-moon tide
45. Coastal raptor
46. Tabloid topic
47. Roulette bet
48. Half-moon tide
49. Coastal raptor
50. Tabloid topic
51. Roulette bet
52. Half-moon tide
53. Coastal raptor
54. Tabloid topic
55. Roulette bet
56. Half-moon tide
57. Coastal raptor
58. Tabloid topic
59. Roulette bet
60. Half-moon tide
61. Coastal raptor
62. Tabloid topic
63. Roulette bet
64. Half-moon tide
65. Coastal raptor
66. Tabloid topic
67. Roulette bet
68. Half-moon tide
69. Coastal raptor
70. Tabloid topic
71. Roulette bet
72. Setter whose clues left the British worried, awed, perplexed