



David Patrick Columbia's

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Rain at the beginning of the day



4:00 PM. Photo: Jeffrey Hirsch.

Friday, May 10, 2013. Rain at the beginning of the day which tapered off just after noontime, followed by a bright, sunny day.

Today is the birthday of Fred Astaire who was born 1899 as **Frederick Austerlitz** in Omaha to **Johanna** (always known as **Ann**) **Geilus** and **Frederic Austerlitz** born **Friedrich Emanuel Austerlitz** in Linz, Austria to Jewish parents who converted to Catholicism.

Fred was the greatest dancer of the 20th century. That is arguable to some but not to the hundreds of millions who over his lifetime and ours have been thrilled and inspired by the terpsichorean attitude toward life that he created.



Tomorrow, May 11, one of Fred's great friends and supporters, **Irving Berlin** was born – eleven years before him, in 1888 in Mogilev in the Tsarist Russian Empire. Berlin outlived Fred

by two years, dying at 101 in 1989.

The talents and collaboration of Fred Astaire and Irving Berlin – one the son of an immigrant and the other, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants – defined, even symbolized the American sentiment of life in the 20th century. They were hardworking geniuses.



Fred Astaire on the RKO Studios lot during the filming of "Top Hat" in 1935. Hollywood, California.

Among others who share their birthday are **Bono, Judith Jamison, Donovan, Dave Mason, Nancy Walker** ("Rhoda's" ma), **Linda Evangelista, David O. Selznick** (producer of "*Gone With the Wind*," **Thomas Lipton** (tea), **Leon Bakst, Maybelle Carter, Barbara Taylor Bradford, Bel Kaufman**, (celebrating her 102nd), **Arthur Kopit, Sid Vicious, Mark David Chapman**, the man who assassinated **John Lennon**, and **John Wilkes Booth**, the man who assassinated **President Lincoln**.

Yesterday was the Women & Science Lecture and Luncheon at the Rockefeller University on York Avenue and 67th Street. I've attended one other luncheon of theirs a couple of years ago. It's a Springtime luncheon, in a large white, airy tent on the rather cramped yet astoundingly beautiful campus overlooking the East River. Wherever there aren't buildings or public spaces in use, there are flowers and fauna.



The gardens on the campus of Rockefeller University yesterday noontime just as the rains were abating and the sun was about to shine.

This is a very prestigious luncheon in the New York scheme of things. Its roster of supporters are some of the most active philanthropists in New York and the world. Rockefeller University, a/k/a Rockefeller Institute, and at the time of its founding more than a century ago, Rockefeller Hospital, once upon a time ministered to patients. During the Depression of the 1930s, children of financially stressed working people, a/k/a the poor found excellent *free* treatment there.

It is one of those great Rockefeller-founded philanthropies that makes tangible differences in the lives of individuals and the health and welfare of society. Today it is the first institution in our country that is devoted solely to biomedical research.

The Women & Science luncheon is a fund-raiser, organized by large group of women and men. They contribute more than \$1 million annually to support research and education at the university.

This luncheon always begins with a lecture. I am one who has never been drawn by personal interest to scientific matters per se, and medical science in particular. Nevertheless, as it is

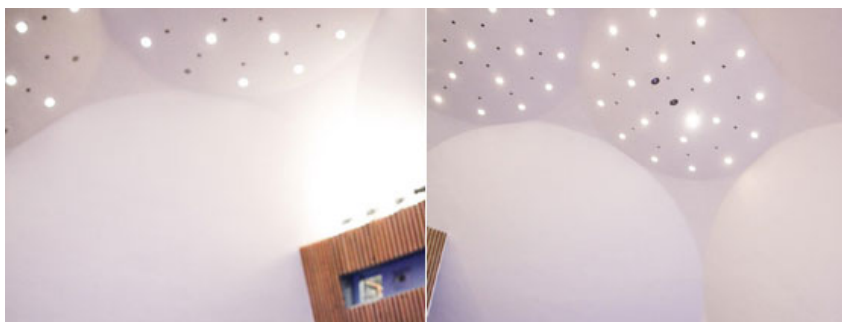
with anything outside one's scope of interest, when presented well, one is naturally drawn into it. The Women & Science luncheon lecture is one of those matters. It is always sold out and requiring extra space via video transmission. This is not in anyway a fashion event or a social event, however. The audience is there to listen and to learn (and to be amazed). Period.



Dr. Cori Bargmann beginning her lecture on "molecules" in the brain and demonstrating visually, the differences that levels of oxytocin makes in bonding in worms. The illustration of the different levels of success or difficulty in the worms applies to us boys and girls too.

This year's lecture was "Ancient Molecules and the Modern Brain: Understanding Our Social Nature." I am ill-equipped to report on it without any real comprehension of the subject. The lecturer, **Cori Bargmann PhD**, the *Torsten N. Wiesel Professor* Lulu and Anthony Wang Laboratory of Neural Circuits and Behavior at Rockefeller U., is an excellent teacher. A tall attractive woman, with a gentle, matter-of-fact style of lecturing, her grasp of her subject is awesome and perhaps because of that, she can ply your imagination so you're compelled to listen.

She talked about the similarities of all living creatures, using worms as a base example. Like us, they can taste, smell, seek physical comfort, and bond – among other similarities. Oxytocin, a mammalian hormone that plays a role in sexual reproduction during and after childbirth, as well as in facilitating birth, and maternal bonding is found in all living creatures. From the worm to the human. Its presence plays a key role also in various behaviors such as social recognition, pair bonding, anxiety and orgasm. This is You that I'm talking about. Me. Us. And all. We.





Hundreds of guests rapt with attention.

The lecture ran about fifty minutes. Dr. Bargmann is such a relaxed yet efficient instructor on her subject that the amphitheater with hundreds of guests was rapt with attention. No doubt they too were impressed by Dr. Bargmann’s knowledge and her highly accessible way of providing understanding for the layperson. What is demonstrated also is our basic nature to explore and learn. That’s in the molecule mix too.

After the lecture there is an excellent lunch in a vast tent that comfortably held the several hundred guests – mainly women obviously. At many tables there is a higher level of lunch conversation perhaps because of the atmosphere. At our table the conversation was about international politics and the state of the world in general, including out in the streets of New York. Surrounded as we were by these hallowed halls of scientific research and learning, there was a natural dose of optimism granted us for the moment by its achievements – and the achievements of the Women & Science Committee.

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Nancy Kissinger.

Shirin von Wulffen.

Marilyn Simons.



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The photos at work in the luncheon tent ...



Dr. Cori Bargmann and Shelby White.





Justine Koons and Samantha Boardman Rosen.



Marc-Tessier Lavigne and Samantha Boardman Rosen.



Jeanne Donovan Fisher and Marlene Hess.





Lady waiting for her car, accompanied by favored lizard. *Photo: DPC.*

The RKO film "Top Hat" starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers was released in 1935 with a score of Irving Berlin tunes, many of which became classics in the American songbook, and many associated with Fred Astaire. Berlin said that Astaire was the best man to introduce a song (and make it a hit).

Photographs by **David X Prutting**/BFAnyc.com

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