



Ira Aldridge: The Early Years, 1807-1833 (Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora)

Bernth Lindfors

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Ira Aldridge: The Early Years, 1807-1833 chronicles the rise of one of the modern world's first black classical actors, as he ascended from an impoverished childhood in New York City to a career as a celebrated thespian on the British stage. After a successful debut in London in 1825, Aldridge began touring the British provinces, billing himself grandiloquently as the "African Roscius," and attracting crowds with his powerful presence and style. He received accolades not only as a tragedian in classic roles such as Othello and Oroonoko but also as a comic actor in popular farces and musicals. In 1833, when a bill to abolish slavery was being debated in Parliament, he was called back to London to perform at one of the city's most prestigious theaters, where his appearance, now under his own name but also billed as "a native of Senegal," created a great deal of controversy. In dealing with Aldridge's emergence as a professional actor in the United Kingdom, Lindfors here records in detail the ups and downs of his itinerant existence in a world where no theatergoer had ever seen anyone like him on stage before. Aldridge was genuinely a unique phenomenon in Britain at a pivotal point in history. Bernth Lindfors is Professor Emeritus of English and African Literatures, University of Texas at Austin, and editor of *Ira Aldridge: The African Roscius* (University of Rochester Press, 2007).

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