

# An Environmental Film Festival and High-Tech Music

By JASCHA HOFFMAN FEB. 24, 2014

March events at the intersection of science and culture.

## FILM

**Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital.** Washington, March 18-30.

This annual festival dwells on risks and threats to humans and other animals. Erratic weather “goes very quickly from being a local economic problem” to “a global security problem,” we hear in “Extreme Realities,” narrated by Matt Damon, which looks at the consequences of climate change. Some films assess the risks of chemicals in batteries, furniture and household products. (Sean Penn’s “The Human Experiment,” which blames chemical companies for cancer, autism and infertility, promotes natural detergents on its website.) Others depict animals at risk: “Emptying the Skies,” based on an essay by the novelist Jonathan Franzen, follows activists who liberate songbirds from poachers’ traps in southern Europe; another follows the marine biologist Sylvia Earle (known as “Her Deepness”) as she pushes for a network of underwater “hope spots” where ocean life will be protected from human threats.

“**Particle Fever.**” Opens March 5 at Film Forum, 209 West Houston Street, Manhattan, then at theaters nationwide. Dennis Overbye’s article is on Page 3.

## MUSIC

**Vocal Vibrations.** Le Laboratoire, Paris. Opens March 28. Free.

From the people who brought you inhalable chocolate, here comes a high-tech singalong. Visitors start in a chamber filled with ethereal music by the composer Tod Machover. When they wander into a private “cocoon” designed by Neri Oxman, they can sing while an electronic necklace measures vibrations in the larynx, getting instant feedback as the sonic aura adapts to the visitor’s voice and a grapefruit-size “orb” vibrates in the hands. The installation will feed into a larger investigation on the healing power of the human voice. When it travels to Cambridge, Mass., in the fall, a cartilage expert will ask whether skilled humming might improve the health of joints, a neuroscientist will try to match up vocal performance and brain measurements, and a Tibetan monk will attempt to engineer a better method of chanting.

**Robotic Musicianship Concert. Part of the Atlanta Science Festival.** Kennesaw, Ga. March 22 at 8 p.m. Free.

Two years ago, the drummer Jason Barnes lost an arm when he was jolted by an electric charge while cleaning a restaurant oven. Rather than learning to play with one stick, as Def Leppard’s drummer did in the 1980s, Mr. Barnes sought a musical prosthetic. Enter Gil Weinberg of the Georgia Institute of Technology who has built a number of musical robots, including one that plays the marimba. This concert will showcase a sleek prosthesis that uses muscle sensors to let the drummer control his strokes and features a second stick with “a mind of its own,” turning him into a rhythmic cyborg. Dr. Weinberg hopes his efforts to get the timing right, down to the millisecond, will come in handy for other artificial limbs. “If you’re an astronaut doing repairs on the International Space Station,” he said, “when you lift your hand, your third arm could hand you the screwdriver just in time.”

## TELEVISION

**Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey.** Sundays, starting March 9, on Fox.

More than 30 years after PBS first broadcast “Cosmos: A Personal Journey,” the beloved 13-part series with the astronomer Carl Sagan as host, this new version will make its debut on Fox, with the astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson assuming the Sagan role. Advance screenings are being held on March 4 at 10 locations around the country, including the American Museum of Natural History in New York.