

= World Science Festival , 2008 =

The 2008 World Science Festival was a science festival held in New York City . The festival (May 28 ? June 1 , 2008) consisted mainly of panel discussions and on @-@ stage conversations , accompanied by multimedia presentations . A youth and family program presented topics such as sports from a scientific perspective and included an extensive street fair . A cultural program led by actor and writer Alan Alda focused on art inspired by science . The festival also included a World Science Summit , a meeting of high @-@ level participants from the worlds of science , politics , administration , and business .

The festival was the brainchild of Columbia University physicist Brian Greene and his wife , Emmy Award @-@ winning television journalist Tracy Day . It was held in partnership with major New York City cultural and academic institutions , including Columbia University , New York University and the Metropolitan Museum of Art .

= = History and background = =

The World Science Festival was founded by Brian Greene , a Columbia University physics professor and author of several popular @-@ science books (such as The Elegant Universe) , and his wife , Emmy Award @-@ winning television journalist Tracy Day . Inspired by a visit to the 2005 Festival della Scienza in Genoa , where Greene had been invited to speak , the two decided that founding a similar festival in New York City would be a unique opportunity to bring science to the wider public . As they envisioned it , such a festival would allow them to combine Greene 's skills as a scientist and science communicator with Day 's as a journalist and producer : the events were meant to be rooted in science , but also to conform to the production standards of professional TV or theater productions .

Day and Greene sounded out scientists and science communicators about their idea , enlisting many of their contacts as the festival 's scientific advisors . They met with the presidents of the city 's major universities and its cultural and scientific institutions , forging partnerships for the festival 's organization . According to Greene , their idea fell on open ears wherever they went , and the most frequent reaction to their proposal was the expression of disbelief that a festival like this did not already exist in New York City . Early 2006 saw the founding of the Science Festival Foundation (SFF) , a non @-@ profit organization based in New York City , dedicated to organizing the festival and related events . Greene serves as the foundation 's chairman , and is also on its board of directors . The other members of the board are Alan Alda , Columbia University president Lee Bollinger , the foundation 's president Judith Cox , New York University president John Sexton , and Tracy Day , who also serves as the festival 's executive director .

Next came the assembly of a team of producers who were to organize the festival 's events . Notably Kyle Gibson , an Emmy Award @-@ winning former producer of Nightline with Ted Koppel , joined the festival as senior program producer , while production of the Youth and Family Program was put into the hands of Robin Reardon , a former show producer for Walt Disney Imagineering and former vice president of Universal Studios Creative , who also became the festival 's managing director .

The foundation organizes the World Science Festival (WSF) in partnership with Columbia University , New York University , the City University of New York , Rockefeller University and the Cooper Union , as well as cultural institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art , the Guggenheim Museum , and the Museum of Modern Art . Financial support comes from individuals , from numerous foundations , and from corporate sponsors which , for the 2008 festival , included the Sloan Foundation , the Simons Foundation , the Templeton Foundation , the Rockefeller Foundation , the Cullman Foundation , and Credit Suisse .

= = Inaugural festival = =

The inaugural World Science Festival took place from May 28 to June 1 , 2008 , at 22 venues

throughout New York City . It included 46 events , a street fair and , on its first day , the one @-@ day World Science Summit at Columbia University . The Festival was attended by 120 @,@ 000 people . It featured several different kinds of presentations : science events for a general audience , a cultural program focusing on art inspired by science , and a youth and family program .

= = = World Science Summit = = =

Preceding the public events was the invitation @-@ only World Science Summit on May 28 , 2008 ; New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg opened the Festival . At the summit , an invited audience interacted with eminent scientists in several panel discussions . Participants included Nina Federoff (Science and Technology Advisor to U. S. Secretary of State , Condoleezza Rice) , biologist David Baltimore and cancer researcher Harold Varmus .

As part of the summit , the winners of the first Kavli Prizes were announced in a simulcast linking New York City and Oslo . The first Kavli Prize for astrophysics was awarded to Maarten Schmidt and Donald Lynden @-@ Bell for their pioneering work on quasars . Louis E. Brus and Sumio Iijima shared the nanoscience prize for their contributions to the science of quantum dots and carbon nanotubes , respectively . Pasko Rakic , Thomas Jessell and Sten Grillner were awarded the neuroscience prize for their research into how neuronal networks develop and communicate .

= = = Festival events = = =

Events covered a wide variety of scientific topics , and combined talks , demonstrations , video presentations and panel discussions . A number of events addressed " big questions " . For example , a roster of scientists including physicist William Phillips , philosopher Patricia Churchland , neuroscientist Antonio Damasio , philosopher Daniel Dennett , cognitive scientist Marvin Minsky , and cancer researcher Harold Varmus , debated " What It Means to Be Human " in a panel discussion moderated by Charlie Rose . A recurring theme was the wider implications of scientific results , as exemplified by a discussion on the promises and consequences of personal genomics involving biochemist Paul Nurse , sociologist Nikolas Rose , and human genome project leader Francis Collins . A number of events explored the interface between science and the arts ; for instance , a panel including psychologist Nancy C. Andreasen , choreographer and dancer Bill T. Jones , and actor and writer Michael York focused on the scientific study of creativity . Other audiences saw physicists Lawrence Krauss and radio host Ira Flatow presenting modern cosmology , paleontologist Richard Leakey exploring the sixth extinction , and chemist F. Sherwood Rowland and Rensselaer Polytechnic president Shirley Ann Jackson discussing new ways of satisfying humanity 's energy needs . A number of events were co @-@ productions with the festival 's partners , such as a discussion between Robert Krulwich and neurologist and author Oliver Sacks on perception , held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art , and musician Mark Oliver Everett 's exploration of the scientific legacy of his father , Hugh Everett , at the Museum of Modern Art .

The festival 's cultural program ranged from a string theory @-@ themed dance performance choreographed by Karole Armitage to a storytelling event in cooperation with The Moth , which featured journalist and writer Lucy Hawking , physicist Jim Gates and writer Sam Shepard , among others . Alan Alda revisited his role as Richard Feynman in Peter Parnell 's play QED in a staged reading at Columbia University 's Miller Theatre , and the choir of the Abyssinian Baptist Church joined Oliver Sacks in an exploration of music and science . The festival also saw the première of Dear Albert , a reading for the stage written by Alda based on the letters of Albert Einstein , and starring Anthony LaPaglia as Einstein .

Events for a younger audience included an examination of the science of sports (with sports scientist Tom Crawford , neuroscientist David Eagleman , and athletes such as Brevin Knight , Lisa Willis and Leilani Mitchell) . For the festival 's first event , New York City high @-@ school students interviewed robotics expert Cynthia Breazeal and physicist Leon Lederman on @-@ stage , moderated by MTV 's SuChin Pak . Another event was presented by the Disney Imagineers , who explored the science of special effects and amusement park technology , from roller coasters and

fireworks to motion capture and artificial fog .

== Street Fair ==

The WSF Street Fair took place in and around Washington Square Park , on the New York University campus , on Saturday , May 30 , 2008 . Although it was interrupted by a thunderstorm , the street fair was attended by 100 @, @ 000 people , according to estimates from the New York Police Department .

Stage events at the street fair included live performances by the " Mathemagician " Arthur T. Benjamin , " science rapper " Zach Powers of PCR RAP fame , and a band called " The Mathematicians " , science demonstrations by teams from institutions such as the Liberty Science Center and the Franklin Institute , and presentations by journalist and author Lucy Hawking and visual artist Scott Draves , among others . The street fair featured appearances by Disney 's animatronic dinosaur Lucky , by characters from science- and education @-@ related TV shows such as Cyberchase , It 's a Big Big World , Clifford the Big Red Dog and Zula Patrol , as well as demonstrations by teams participating in the New York ? New Jersey FIRST Robotics Competition , and hands @-@ on activities such as owl pellet dissections and miniature rocket launches . Also present were a movable museum from the American Museum of Natural History and the Magic School Bus .

== Reception ==

Festival coverage leading up to the 2008 festival , which included articles in major newspapers and appearances by Alda and Greene on national shows such as Regis and Kelly and The Colbert Report , mostly focused on introducing the festival 's concept , organizers and events , and on the promise of bringing an event of this type to New York . Aside from mention of small organizational glitches , coverage of festival events was generally positive . Both Good Morning America and Science News focused on the potential of the festival to inspire the next generation of scientists and " make geek chic " . The New York Post described the festival 's role in New York 's cultural landscape as the geek counterpart of Fashion Week and the Tony Awards , while the Science Channel 's coverage characterized the festival as " wonderfully inspiring and informative " . The New York Times noted that Greene and Day appeared to have succeeded in creating " a new cultural institution " ; further Times articles declared the festival a critical and a box office success .

Online coverage typically focused on specific festival events . Notably , Science , Wired , The Science Channel and USA Today provided same @-@ day or next @-@ day accounts of events including " What It Means to Be Human " , " Ramachandran / Kurzweil : Humanity Now / Humanity Next " , " Future Cities " , as well as the two events featuring Oliver Sacks .