

## Editorial

# The World Science Festival—Could This Go Viral?

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*5 Days. 50 Events. Infinite Ideas. June 1–5, 2011, New York City.* Short, direct and exciting. The website pulls you in: <http://worldsciencefestival.com/>.

Dennis Overbye, a science writer at the *New York Times* wrote an informative article on June 2 on how the Festival came to be and how it thrives: “This is the fourth consecutive year for the World Science Festival, which was founded by Brian Greene, the Columbia University mathematician and physicist and best-selling author, and Tracy Day, his wife and a former ABC television producer. Mr. [Alan] Alda, a longtime science buff and popularizer, is their co-conspirator. A triad of “founding benefactors” — the Simons Foundation, the John Templeton Foundation and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation — have kept it afloat with an annual budget of about \$5 million.”<sup>1</sup> Mr. Overbye describes the Festival as “the annual smooch-fest between science and art.”

The Festival very consciously shows science in its human aspect, connected to the humanities and the arts. This year you can learn about Antoine and Marie-Anne Lavoisier, starting from Jacques-Louis David’s famous 1788 portrait of the couple. The politics of the man and his science, how he came afoul of the revolution and was guillotined—all start from looking at this painting and how it came to be.

Festival goers can learn about neuroscience through a demonstration of music and spontaneity at a jazz session and panel discussion; people can go bug collecting on Governors Island, or look at stars during an evening session in Brooklyn Bridge Park.

Impressive, and with such a big budget, maybe you’re thinking that doing a



*Metropolitan Museum of Art.* The chemist Antoine Lavoisier and his wife and helpmate, Marie-Anne Pierrette Paulze, painted by Jacques-Louis David in 1788.

public event like this is out of your league. But many of us have some of the elements that would make an event like this work. There’s an art to the general programming but expertise exists at many colleges and universities.

Maybe five days, and fifty events, is beyond your reach, but what about a one-day Festival of Science for your area? Maybe a day and a half or two days? Whatever you do, keep access easy and open—move off-campus when it makes sense—and think about how your science gets refracted through society. Partner with your colleagues in the arts and humanities. Look at the World Festival of Science website, and help this good idea go viral.

<sup>1</sup> “A Double Helix of Art and Science,” Dennis Overbye, *The New York Times* (2 June 2011).