



NEWS

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***First Fridays* at the Natural History Museum Celebrates ‘Darwin Year’**

The popular discussion and live music series returns January 9 through June 5, 2009 with Darwin’s Origin of the Species: From a Theory of Evolution to a Cultural Revolution

LOS ANGELES—The highly successful forum and concert series *First Fridays* returns to the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County **January 9 through June 5, 2009** with a dynamic exploration of Charles Darwin — his life, the science of evolution, and the revolutionary impact of the man and his work.

2009 is the 200th anniversary of Darwin’s birth and the 150th anniversary of his world-altering work *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. Often considered one of the most important — and misunderstood — texts published in the sciences, *On the Origin of Species* is also one of a handful of scientific works that has reverberated beyond science, shaking the foundations of art, literature, philosophy, religion and society.



On the first Friday of every month, beginning January 9, the Museum will stay open late to celebrate this important scientific and cultural anniversary with live music and interactive science programming. Each evening begins with a curator-guided gallery tour of the NHM’s renowned collections, and discussions about how those collections contribute to the evolutionary science. Following the tours, guests can take part in book signings and forums filled with distinguished scientists and authors. Neuroscientist Michael W. Quick, who helped organize the series, will moderate the discussions.

“Charles Darwin is an ideal *First Fridays* topic because of the far-reaching impact of his work but also because of the simplicity of his ideas,” said Quick. “There is nothing in Darwin’s ideas that isn’t immediately understandable to anyone so we won’t have to explain a lot, we can just dive right into the discussion. With our diverse audiences and remarkable guest speakers there is no telling what direction that conversation will take.”

Forum participants include author Lyanda Lynn Haupt (*Pilgrim on the Great Bird Continent: The Importance of Everything and Other Lessons from Darwin’s Lost Notebooks*), paleontologist Donald Prothero (*Evolution: What the Fossils Say and Why It Matters*), biologist Neil Shubin (*Your Inner Fish*), zoologist Michael Ryan (*The Túngara Frog, A Study in Sexual Selection and Communication*), paleoanthropologist Donald J. Johanson (*Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind*) and *Skeptic* magazine editor Michael Shermer (*Why Darwin Matters: The Case Against Intelligent Design*).

In addition to the world of science, the series shows its cultural stripes with live performances by musicians and deejays. As in past seasons, NHM has partnered with Silver Lake's Spaceland Productions to curate the series' concerts, and with the non-profit radio collective dublab to curate the DJs. Both the live acts and the DJs invite visitors to discover emerging artists and experience their music in the Museum's iconic diorama halls and grand foyer.

"Now in its fifth season, *First Fridays* has become both a renowned alternative music scene and a popular forum for scientific conversation," said Su Oh, NHM's Manager of Performing Arts and Exhibits, who organized the series. "It's thrilling to see audiences so enthusiastically engaged with our one-of-a-kind combination of science and music."

Advanced tickets for *First Fridays* will be sold via Ticketweb.com. Admission is free for NHM members. Tickets are \$9 for adults, \$6.50 for children. Curator-led tours, films, discussions and performances are available on a first-come, first-serve basis and early purchase is recommended. For more information, the public may visit the NHM's website at www.nhm.org/firstfridays or call (213) 763-DINO.

About Michael W. Quick, Moderator

Michael W. Quick, PhD, *First Fridays* forum moderator, organized the monthly discussions for *Darwin's Origin of the Species: From a Theory of Evolution to a Cultural Revolution*. Dr. Quick is a professor of Biological Sciences and Executive Vice Dean of University of Southern California College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences. He holds a PhD in Neuroscience and his research uses the tools of modern molecular neurobiology to examine the processes that underlie neural communication and which are responsible for drug abuse and addiction.

First Fridays events include:

Friday, January 9, 2009 (extended Museum hours to 10 p.m.)

Darwin's Evolution

Guided Tour (5:30 p.m.): NHM Ornithology Collections Manager Kimball Garrett takes guests on a tour of intriguing, variable bird groups that Darwin would have observed, and talks about how the Museum's collections — even those that are very old — are used in modern day research.

Discussion (6:30 p.m.): Author Lyanda Lynn Haupt and moderator Michael W. Quick appear. Using little-known letters, diaries, and notebooks, writer Haupt explores Darwin's own evolution — from his beginning as a fumbling student of the natural world to his emergence as an original, creative naturalist who could draw complex scientific truths from the observation of life around him.

Performances: Plants and Animals (8 p.m.); The Little Ones (9:15 p.m.)

DJs (throughout the night): The Phatal DJ and J. ROCC

Friday, February 6, 2009 (extended Museum hours to 10 p.m.)

What the Fossils Say and Why It Matters

Guided Tour (5:30 p.m.): NHM Curator Dr. Xiaoming Wang leads a tour of some of the important fossils in the Vertebrate Paleontology collection.

Discussion (6:30 p.m.): In recent years, the topics of evolution, creationism and “intelligent design” have become more controversial than ever. Creationists make lot of false claims about the fossil record and the evidence from “transitional forms” that demonstrate the evolution of new groups of animals. In this lecture, Dr. Don Prothero, Professor of Geology at Occidental College and Lecturer in Geobiology at Caltech, looks at the evidence for evolution from the fossil record, the documentation of “transitional fossils” discovered over the past 20 years, and the implications of evolution for science and society. Prothero is the author, co-author, editor, or co-editor of 25 books and over 200 scientific papers. He serves on the editorial board of *Skeptic* magazine; he is a Fellow of the Geological Society of America, the Paleontological Society, and the Linnaean Society of London; and he has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Science Foundation.

Performances (8 p.m.): Jukebox the Ghost (8 p.m.); The Bird and the Bee (9:15 p.m.)

DJs (throughout the night): The Phatal DJ and DJ Michael Stock (dublab.com)

Friday, March 6, 2009 (extended Museum hours to 10 p.m.)

Finding Your Inner Fish

Guided Tour (5:30 p.m.): NHM Ichthyology Collections Manager Jeff Seigel shows off some of the Museum’s more wonderful, and odd, fish specimens.

Discussion (6:30 p.m.): Why do we look the way we do? The answers to this question come from seemingly strange places: from the bodies, fossils and DNA of everything from microbes to worms and fish. Dr. Neil H. Shubin is a paleontologist and Associate Dean of Organismal and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Chicago. He’ll guide guests through the discovery of a key link between fish and amphibians, and how this ancient event informs the basic structure of the human body. Shubin has found new fossils that change the way we think about many of the key transitions in evolution: from the reptile-mammal transition, the water-land transformation, and the origin of frogs, salamanders, turtles, flying reptiles. He has received a variety of fellowships and awards including a Miller Research Fellowship, Guggenheim Fellowship, The Berlin Prize and ABC News Person of the Week.

Performances (8 p.m.): To Be Announced

DJs (throughout the night): The Phatal DJ and special guest (dublab.com)

Friday, April 3, 2009 (extended Museum hours to 10 p.m.)

Darwin's Other Great Theory: Sexual Selection, or Why Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus?

Guided Tour (5:30 p.m.): Dr. Brian Brown, NHM Entomology Curator, will take guests on a whirlwind tour of some of the Museum's 5.7 million insect specimens, looking for examples of the extremes of sexual selection. From giant horned beetles from the Amazon to neon-colored butterflies from the South Pacific, the NHM collection has specimens that would have blown even Darwin's mind.

Discussion (6:30 p.m.): Darwin's is best known for his theory of natural selection which explains how organisms evolve adaptations for survival. His second theory, sexual selection, attempts to describe

why males and females of the same sex can differ so markedly, and why the sexes can have traits that decrease their ability to survive. Dr. Michael Ryan, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and zoology professor at the University of Texas, Austin, reviews our understanding of sexual behavior in animals, including humans.

Performances (8 p.m.): To Be Announced

DJs (throughout the night): The Phatal DJ and special guest (dublabb.com)

Friday, May 1, 2009 (extended Museum hours to 10 p.m.)

The Quest for Human Origins

Guided Tour (5:30 p.m.): NHM Chief Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology, Dr. John Harris, will show fossil casts from the Lake Turkana Basin, as well as Tanzania and South Africa, many of which will appear in the human evolution component of the Museum's upcoming Age of Mammals exhibit.

Discussion (6:30 p.m.): Paleoanthropologist Dr. Donald C. Johanson — founder of human-evolution think tank, the Institute of Human Origins — highlights some of his discoveries, including the most widely known fossil find of last century, the Lucy skeleton. Although the 20th century has been peppered with important fossil hominid finds from both eastern and southern Africa, it was Johanson's 1974 discovery of a 3.2-million-year-old hominid fossil in Ethiopia that added a crucial link. Lucy prompted ongoing debate and major revisions in our understanding of the human evolutionary past — because the skeleton possessed an intriguing mixture of ape-like features, but also characteristics we consider human.

Many consider Johanson to be among the most important and accomplished paleoanthropologists of our time. Johanson has led field explorations, hosted and narrated the Emmy nominated PBS/NOVA series *In Search of Human Origins*, co-authored nine books, and lectured at universities, corporations, and public forums around the world. He is the founder of the Institute of Human Origins, a human-evolution think tank.

Performances (8 p.m.): To Be Announced

DJs (throughout the night): The Phatal DJ and special guest (dublabb.com)

Friday, June 5, 2009 (extended Museum hours to 10 p.m.)

Why Darwin Matters: Evolution, Intelligent Design, and the Battle for Science and Religion

Guided Tour (5:30 p.m.): NHM Polychaetes Curator Dr. Kirk Fitzhugh gives a tour of NHM sea worms with an emphasis on intelligent design, evolution and the nature of science.

Discussion (6:30 p.m.): Evolution happened, and the theory describing it is one of the most well-founded in all of science. Then why do half of all Americans reject it? In his book *Why Darwin Matters*, and in this same-titled talk, science historian and bestselling author Dr. Michael Shermer — a former evangelical Christian — examines what evolution really is, how we know it happened, and how to test it. Shermer looks at science through a brief history of the evolution-creation trials and debates from the

Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925 to the intelligent design controversies of the 1990s and 2000s, and demonstrates how and why creationism and intelligent design are not part of science. Shermer has appeared on such shows as *The Colbert Report*, *20/20*, *Dateline*, *Charlie Rose*, *Larry King Live*, *Donahue*, *Oprah*, and *Unsolved Mysteries* among others, as a skeptic of weird and extraordinary claims. He has been interviewed in countless documentaries aired on PBS, A&E, Discovery, The History Channel, The Science Channel, and The Learning Channel.

Performances (8 p.m.): To Be Announced

DJs (throughout the night): The Phatal DJ and special guest (dublab.com)

About the Museum

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County serves more than one million families and visitors annually, and is a national leader in research, exhibitions and education. The Museum is L.A.'s second oldest cultural institution, the first to open its doors to the public in 1913, and has amassed one of the world's most extensive and valuable collections of natural and cultural history – more than 35 million objects, some as old as 4.5 billion years. Its mission is to inspire wonder, discovery and responsibility for our natural and cultural worlds.

Museum Admission and Hours

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County is located at 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles. It is open weekdays, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and weekends and holidays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tickets are \$9 for adults, \$6.50 for children. For more information, the public may visit the Museum's website at www.nhm.org/firstfridays or call (213) 763-DINO.