

NEWS, OPINION

# Neuroscience in NOLA

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Cue the jazz music: After nine long years, the **Society for Neuroscience annual meeting** is returning to New Orleans.

For those of you who don't know, this conference is a big (to the tune of 30,000-plus people) deal. Tomorrow, neuroscientists from every corner of the world will descend on the city, taking over its quaint streets and corners, jazz clubs and cafes. And, oh yes, talking science through it all.

There is so much science, in fact, that at SFARI.org, we prepare weeks in advance, poring through the abstracts for the most promising advances in autism research. Last year, our four reporters filed **43 fascinating stories** over the five-day conference.

Many of the results we covered turned out to be previews of landmark papers published this past year: **a new drug candidate for Angelman syndrome** made **a splash in *Nature*** last December, for example; an intriguing finding that **autism brains are inherently more 'noisy'** emerged **last month in *Neuron***; and an early report about the **MET gene's link to brain connectivity** matured into a complex paper **combining genetics with brain imaging**.

There were many more, ranging from the debut of **seven rat models for autism**, an **atlas of gene expression in the brain**, the use of a technique called **optogenetics in monkeys**, and what **zebra finch song can teach us about language** problems in autism. These are all themes that are sure to recur this year, so we hope you will tune in.

In addition to our **weekly newsletter**, we will be sending daily updates from the conference, so please sign up if you're not already a subscriber. We will also be tweeting with the hashtag #sfn12, and you can follow our updates at **@SFARIautismnews**.

The last time this conference was in ‘The Big Easy’ was in 2003, long before Twitter made it so easy to follow the beat. By rights, the meeting should have been there again in 2006, in keeping with its three-year rhythm. But after Hurricane Katrina’s devastation, the society decided to gather in Atlanta. Despite the **valiant efforts of a few young scientists** to return to New Orleans in 2009, the society chose Chicago — a widely unpopular decision given NOLA’s efforts to rebuild itself.

Now, finally, New Orleans is back in the groove, and that’s music to my ears. Where else does a masked dancing man turn out to be a leading cognitive researcher (true story)? Where else can you have scrumptious beignets with powdered sugar as you digest the latest in brain imaging? Where else do the sounds of the saxophone mingle with talk of the **synapse**?

No offense to Atlanta’s attractions or Chicago’s charms, but they are no match for New Orleans’s soul.

*For more reports from the 2012 Society for Neuroscience annual meeting, please **click here**.*