OPINION

A many-splendored thing

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Between Thursday and Sunday last week, New York played host to the first annual **World Science Festival**, a fantastic lineup of events featuring more than 125 of the world?s most brilliant and original thinkers.

Full disclosure: The Simons Foundation is one of the festival's sponsors. But that doesn't take away from the fact that fully packed halls listened to discussions on space, global warming, neuroscience, string theory, genetics, mathematics and predictions on the **future of science**.

If anything, there were too many choices, as one reporter **playfully lamented**. There was a fascinating look at **brain-machine interfaces**. There was *Dear Albert*, The Letters of Albert Einstein, a play written by the actor Alan Alda, who seems to charm everyone he meets. And there was a fascinating talk on music and the brain by Oliver Sacks, one of my personal heroes.

There was a street fair in Washington Square Park thronged by families, and the debut of the Kavli prizes, awarded to three brilliant scientists in the fields of nanoscience, astrophysics and neuroscience.

The goal was to celebrate science?s power and promise, and to open the eyes of children and adults alike to its magic. As festival co-founder and physicist **Brian Greene put it** in a column in *The New York Times* on Sunday, “You don?t have to be a scientist for science to be transformative.”

If the numbers are any indication - festival officials estimate attendance at 120,000 - people in New York are well on their way to being transformed.