Observer & Eccentric | Sunday, May 4, 2003

Cranbrook Institute of Science observes total lunar eclipse

Jeffery Bass isn't anticipating any volcanoes disrupting the view of a total lunar eclipse (11:18 p.m.) Thursday, May 15, so he's specially hus y planning a hoat of activities for star gazers at Cranbrook Institute of Science in Bloomfield Hills.

Last time the rare event occurred, Cranbrook's astronomy director couldn't even see the moon as it passed through the carth's shadow, But this total lunar eclipse is going to be different.

On any day of the week local planetariums and observatories are good places to learn about what's going on in the sky (See related story below). At Cranbrook, Digistar II technology allows Bass and his staff to project the star field and moon onto the ceiling of the darkened planetarium theater and take audiences of all ages on virtual reality tours around the universe. Before even stepping outside to view a night sky bursting with stars, planets and galaxies, they hear facts about the moon – that it moves 2 100 miles an hour and a lunar eclipse is preceded or followed by a solar eclipse because the alignment holds for 2 weeks.

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Jeffery Bass looks through the 6-inch refractory telescope in the Observatory at Cranbrook Institute of Science in Bloomfield Hills.

learn about the rare total lunar eclipse in the Planetarium before going on to view the event outdoors or through the 6-inch refractory telescope in

6-inch retractory telescope in the Observatory. "We'll have even bigger tele-scopes outside so there will be ample telescope viewing opportunities," said Bass. "There's a ense of voodoo whenever we plan an event.

We're hoping for a nice night. Although we'll have telescopes outside you don't need one to watch the celipse. The moon will be a coppery red not black unless the earth a timesphere is dirty from pollution or volcanic eruption then it will be black. In ancient times the celipse struck fear into the people when the moon turned blood red."

Bass could go on talking about the moon and stars forever. Ironically he didn't earn his degree in astronomy at the University of Michigan where he studied the subject and worked in the planetarium. It was a doctorate in music from the Ann Arbor university that helped him land the job as Cranbrook's director of astronomy and Planetarium 16 years ago.

PLAMETARIUMS

Cranbrook Institute of Science, Astronomy Day 1-4 p.m. Saturday, May 10. Total lunar eclipse activities 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. (planetarium shows 8 p.m. and 9 p.m.) Thursday, May 15. Call (877) 462-7262 or visit www.cranbrook.edu

M Detroit Science Center. Astronomy Day 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday, May 10. Call (313) 577-8400 or www.detroitsciencecenter.org

University of Michigan **Exhibit Museum of Natural** History, Call (734) 764-0478, (734) 763-6085 (recorded message) or visit the Web site at www.exhibits.lsa.umich.edu/

"Cranbrook needed some-one to produce planetarium shows and I'm a composer, said Bass. "I write a lot of music for shows. For The Sky Tonight: Mars and Worlds

Beyond program-i used a variety of styles from spacey to techno sound to change the mood so we don't have a sleepy planetarium show. That's the fun thing about this job. We try to deliver science information in an interesting way. Otherwise it's a dry textbook experience. "The next cool thing is viewing Mars which has been the closest to earth in 73,000 years. We produce our own shows and a live sky for Mars and Worlds Beyond (8 p.m. Friday, 12:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. Saturday-Sunday May 23 to Sept. 1) to show what going on in the current night sky." The Planetarium at Cranbrook Institute of Science

Cranbrook Institute of Science Cranbrook Institute of Science offers a number of weekend programs for stargazers age 3 and up. For more information on planetarium shows and sky updates visit the Web site at www.cranbrook.edu. The site also provides links to Michigan astronomy clubs and NASA.

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"Our Universe Tonight & WSKY is a fictitious radio show for age 5 and up with interplanetary traffic reports and a call in session with Dr. Cosmos (8 pm. Friday, 12:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. Saturday-Sunday through May 18), fadd Blass. "It's kind of like fireworks set to mail."

Learn about sky at local planetariums

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Stat gazers don't have to travel very far to learn about the nighttime sky. Planetariums at the Detroit Science Center, Cranbrook Institute of Science in Bloomfield Hills, and University of Michigan's Exhibit Museum of Natural History, Ann Arbor, offer regular shows and special events.

On Astronomy Day Saturday, May 10, the Cranbrook science museum and Detroit Science Center have scheduled activities including telescope viewing, At Cranbrook visitors can register to win a telescope from Rider's Hobby Shop in Livonia.

"We'll be looking at the sun with filters if the weather is clear and give tours of the observatory, and Jeffery Bass, Cranbrook's Observatory and Planetarium director. "We'll be laffery Bass, Cranbrook's Observatory and Planetarium director. "We'll be laffery Bass, Cranbrook's Observatory and Planetarium director. "We'll be Intended Planetarium shows including one for ages 3 to 5 with Frankie the Firefly. There's plenty of cool stuff for all ages,"

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Ford Astronomical Club will also have solar telescopes set up outside so Detroit Science Center visitors can look at the sun during

Center visitors can look at the sun during Astronomy Day.
"We'll be making a great crater on the sci-ence stage," said Todd Slisher, director of the-aters at the science center. "We'll have make and take projects to create your own constel-lations."

lations.

Sibher is especially proud of the programs shown in the 116-seat Planetarium which oned Dec. 8, 2001 in the center. The 8-3.8 latest technology including Digistar II, the latest technology including Digistar II, the center that the start frequency in the start frequency. The reason it's so spectacular is we don't just do the star fled," said Slisher who earned degrees in astronomy and physics from the University of Michigan and worked in the

planetarium there. "It's 3 dimensional so we can fly you from Earth to the Orion Constellation. We have full dome graphics provided by over 60 projectors plus video and stills and special effects. There's quite a mix of media used to project these shows.

All of that technology went into creating one of the most dramatic Planetarium shows ever seen - Night of the Titanic which is running in conjunction with the Titanic exhibit and IMAX movie Titanica through Sunday, Sept. 7. Over 200 artifacts recovered from the shipwreck are on display in the exhibit.

"The Planetarium show has an emotional impact," said Silsher. "It covers the science of why it went down but gives you the feeling you were there."

impact, said Silner. It covers the section why it went down but gives you the feeling you were there.

On a lighter note, Spring Skies investigates the constellations 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. weekdays through Friday, June 20, alternating with Night of the Titanic at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. weekdays and almost hourly on weekends through Sunday, Sept. 7.

"Spring Skies features a lot of galaxies in the spring skies if you have a telescope," said Slisher. "We teach them to star hop and use the big dipper to find different constellations like Leo the Lion. Jupiter is in the nighttime sky right now. In fact Jupiter is the brightest besides the moon right now. In Spring Skies we fly out to the stars. There are a huge number of galaxies like No. 151, also known as the Whitipool galaxy all clustered together where two galaxies collided and interacted."

In addition to public shows, the Detroit Science Center offers seven different shows for school groups to help kids explore the skies. "We want to raise awareness about our nighttime skies and that were losing them to light pollution because of all the building going up," said Slisher. "The sky is beautiful; something everyone can enjoy. All you need is your eyes.

"Astronomy is something wonderful. We

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want to encourage people to become involved whether you just go out and gaze or buy expensive equipment or decide to become a research astronomer. Planetariums educate people and get them interested in the science whether they simply want to gaze at the nighttime skies or go on to work at NASA with the Hubble Telescope.

U-M EXHIBIT MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Like Slisher, Matthew Linke is telling audiences at the Planetarium in the University of Michigan Exhibit Museum of Natural History about spring skies through Sunday, June 8.

Spring is the best time of year to see the most famous pattern in the sky, the Big Dipper. Linke invites stargacers to the Planetarium to Join Phread and Phooey, two Martians, who are sent to Earth to explore the sky. Linke will also be talking about the total lunar cellipse during the Saturday-Sunday planetarium shows.

um shows.

"The eclipse is rather dramatic," said Linke.
"We talk about it before because I think it's
more important to know it's going to happen
and when, and that unlike solar eclipses it's
completely safe to look at."

Ichomin@ne.fomeromm.nel [(734) 953-2145

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