

# CONTACT SHEET

What's New, Cool Events, Interesting People, **Great Ideas**, Etc.



## PICTURING LIFE



Nature photographer Frans Lanting used 35mm Nikon film and digital cameras to capture the evolution of life on Earth

**BY LORNA GENTRY**

Years ago, *National Geographic* photographer Frans Lanting experienced a euphoric and disorienting moment as he stood on a beach in Delaware Bay. He was surrounded by horseshoe crabs that had come ashore to spawn, as they have for hundreds of millions of years. "It was getting dark and I couldn't see all the modern structures anymore," he recalls. "It was like being back in another era.

I made some photos that had that haunting feeling of a time capsule and it led me to think, If I deliberately start looking for these windows in time maybe I can put images together that will give people an experience of going from the beginning of time to the present."

That idea sparked a seven-year quest that culminated in a 2006 book "Life: A Journey Through Time," re-released in June in a new

format by Taschen; a traveling photo exhibition; and a multimedia show performed worldwide. Lanting photographed on every continent—by air, sea, and land—and consulted scientists from various disciplines to build a visual timeline depicting the evolution of life. Last month “Life” was performed in Amsterdam, and it will be performed again in April 2013 in Hartford, Conn.

Midway through shooting the project, Lanting met with music director Marin Alsop about combining his photographs with music. Alsop brought in composer Philip Glass to write the symphonic score. Lanting paired images to music by working with choreographer Alexander Nichols. The resulting one-hour show is “a feast for both eyes and ears,” wrote one reviewer. While a symphony performs the score, more than 200 images appear on a 45-foot wide screen. Since its 2006 premiere, “Life” has been performed 25 times worldwide. “We keep finding new audiences and adapting it,” says Lanting.

For example, in Geneva in 2008, the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) requested a presentation for the inauguration of the Large Hadron Collider, the immense particle accelerator that recently discovered Higgs boson, also known as the “God particle.” Lanting added to the visual score some CERN images as well as photos from NASA’s Hubble Telescope.

Lanting hopes the Life project will promote reflection on the intrinsic weave of humanity and Earth. “I hope to make the natural world relevant to people in different countries and cultures. We need it more than ever. As we stretch the limits of planet Earth as a life support system I think it’s an important message.”

*To see more of the Life project, visit [lifethroughtime.com](http://lifethroughtime.com).*

