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Pulse of the planet

By [Jim Regan](#) | csmonitor.com

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA - If you're planning to create a portrait of someone, chances are that you'll expect to use a camera, or if you possess the talent, a sketchpad. For the last twenty years or so, Jim Metzner (seen [here](#) using a very large microphone to record a very small bird) has employed a tape recorder in his efforts to capture his subjects, with the Earth as his primary theme - and for more than a decade, **Pulse of the Planet** has been demonstrating the fine art of portraiture via sound bite.

Already familiar to more than a million radio listeners, Pulse of the Planet broadcasts a two-minute snapshot of the home planet over 320 stations in 20 countries every weekday. Using narration along with natural and man-made sounds from around the world, the series has taken its audience from the soothing tones of the Spring Peeper, to the more "stimulating" task of performing a physical on a 300 pound gorilla.

It has shared such mysteries as the physics of firewalking, and the art and science of fly fishing. Now through the program's online presence, surfers can audit these mini-docs at their own convenience, browse through previous broadcasts, and avail themselves of a few other web-only advantages.

Apart from the unavoidable - but not excessive - bandwidth demands of downloading the audio files themselves, Pulse tries to keep its site as accessible as possible to lower tech connections. With a basic layout and a page width that will still fit into 640 x 480 screens, the site takes surfers directly to the heart of the content, without tying up bandwidth to load splash screens or opening animations.

Upper left in the home page's layout is *Today's Story* - ensuring that separation from a radio won't mean missing your daily dose of auditory enlightenment. Stories each have their own page with a transcript of the content - in case you want to preview before committing to a download. Archives dating to January of 1996 are available through a navigation bar at the top of every page. (Archived sound files only go back to September of 2002 despite apparent MP3 links on some older pages - but transcripts are available for the entire collection.)

With more than nine years of episodes in the archive, the random browser can expect a good deal of variety. Examples range from the impact of global warming on penguins, to wedding music on Crete, to "Listening to the Universe: Exploring With Sound."

A keyword search is also available for those who'd rather try homing in on specific topics. Some subjects (such as the annual "Tully Ice Harvest," and the ongoing threat of "Biological Invaders") are covered over several episodes, and the home page also offers current and archived *Features* - which link regular episodes to additional information and related websites.

For those interested in something a bit more exhaustive, though less up to date, National Geographic once hosted PotP files, and the [legacy site](#) still holds such features as "Casa de la Trova: Cuba's Down-home Music Salon." Before getting to the

audio files in this look at Cuba's musical culture, The NatGeo site first introduces visitors to the Casas (state-sponsored music salons) and the locale (in this case, Santiago), with maps and photo galleries. When the music does appear, it's in the form of four full length songs recorded onsite - including a version of Guantanamera as interpreted in the country of its origin.

Other feature-length tours at the Geographic site include a look at the Cajun style of celebrating Mardi Gras, an audio excursion around Fez, Morocco, and an introduction to silk manufacturing in Bursa, Turkey. Files are in RealAudio format and are archived by category (Science, Culture, Nature) rather than date.

And don't take the home page's "Today's Story" link too literally - though it features the correct day and month, the story I saw for January 9th turned out to be from a 2001 broadcast, and so was a bit out of sync with its coverage of "tonight's full moon." (Of course, this does also mean that some of the MP3 audio files too old to be archived at the Pulse site may still be available in RealAudio at the Geographic site - the Web can be a confusing place.)

Back at the Pulse site, a *Listener Initiative* page invites surfers to submit seasonal stories, in the "hope to initiate a nationwide call to document oral histories of indigenous knowledge of traditional folklore and local environments." A CD of some of the series' more compelling sounds is also available onsite.

Given the nature of the production, it comes as no surprise that Pulse offers only the most rudimentary introductions to its subjects, so if a topic peaks your interest (Scandinavian Reindeer Jazz, for example), you're on your own to undertake further research. Still, since you're already online, you only need to fire up your favorite search engine and set off whatever directions suit your needs.

Pulse of the Planet can be found at <http://www.pulseplanet.com/>.

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