

Earth Day Honored With IMAX Film ‘To the Arctic 3D’

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- [Earth Day](#) [2]
- [Greg MacGillivray](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [IMAX](#) [5]
- [Meryl Streep](#) [6]
- [Movie Review](#) [7]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [8]
- [Paul McCartney](#) [9]
- [Stephen Judson](#) [10]
- [To the Arctic 3D](#) [11]
- [Warner Bros. Pictures](#) [12]



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – A second major Earth Day film has emerged from the weekend, along with Disney Studio’s “Chimpanzee.” The documentary “To the Arctic 3D,” narrated by Meryl Streep, is a cautionary and virtuous look at life on the ice caps at the top of the world. The IMAX film has a spectacular vision, showing a planet’s necessary ecosystem in a troubling meltdown state.

The doc is paired with a soundtrack by Paul McCartney, and has such phantasmagoric imagery it’s possible the brain can slip into Yellow Submarine mode. The whole thing works because it is stark and bold in its assertion that greenhouse gasses are ruining a part of the world that keeps every other living thing on the rest of the planet in balance. With supporting roles by the lifeforms that inhabit this part of the world, it is undeniable proof that this situation will keep affecting our climate for the unforeseen future. The IMAX formatted cameras also offer 3D renderings that are breathtaking.

Filmed over a period of four years in the Arctic Circle, director Greg MacGillivray exposes a part of the world that is remote and wild, but teeming with life. His cameras capture the dynamic change between freezing and melting, within the landscape of huge, glacial Arctic ice forms. The nature includes underwater amoebas – it’s the first time cameras have gone down there – walrus (in this case, the walrus isn’t Paul), musk oxen, native birds, migrating caribou and of course, polar bears.



Mama Polar Bear and her Two Cubs in ‘To the Arctic 3D’
Photo credit: Shaun MacGillivray for Warner Bros. Entertainment

In the highlight of the film, the production team got unprecedented access to a mother polar bear and her two cubs. The observation of this family occurred as a surprise. The ice floes around one of the filming ships had the mother hopping around it. Not only could they film the

interaction between the kin – the bears are notoriously hard to get close to – but it also captured a male predator as he chased the family from ice floe to ice floe. It is as compelling as a cliffhanger, more so because it is reality.

The technology of IMAX and 3D combined is offering a different kind of film experience, one that is almost interactive in its visceral sensory perception. From the snowflakes falling around the eyes in the beginning, to the animated elements of illustrating the polar melting, to the swooping cameras over the polar ice, this film brings the audience to the time and place, on a screen that seems as big as the old drive-ins, but inside a theater. This format is best for a film like this, as the foreboding nature of the freezing environment becomes more warm (metaphorically) in such an intimate exploration.

The nature and animals of this region offers an education as a direct thesis in this documentary. The underwater life is crazy, how does anything survive in freezing temperature salt water? Yet, there it is, and the plant and amoeba life is also threatened by the fluctuating temperatures of the water. Towards the end of the film, two of the production team members spend their honeymoon following migrating caribou, forced to run farther to a ever-changing breeding ground. Again, the temperature affected habitat is underscored.

Tim Allen was used to narrate "Chimpanzee," adding color in the comedian's voice. "To the Arctic 3D" was voiced by Meryl Streep, with her usual blend of serious lightness. The power of that picture/voice combination was in the way Streep was able to emphasize the nature-out-of-balance in the face of melting ice. Paul McCartney's soundtrack is boosted with the song "Because," delivered with his mates John, George and Ringo. The rest of the tunes are the hits and misses from his solo career, capped with a surprising choice of "I'm Carrying," an obscure Wings song from the late 1970s.



While the Polar Ice Caps Gently Weep in 'To the Arctic 3D'
Photo credit: Shaun MacGillivray for Warner Bros. Entertainment

The film is ultra creative, really. It impresses because it uses the power of IMAX/3D, the calming mother-tones of Meryl Steep and the choral faculties of the cute Beatle to deliver a nonpartisan reality in a part of the globe that did nothing to deserve it. In both the beauty of the region and the truth of climate change, there is the ice on the top of the world, and we need it as much as we need the sun on our faces.

"Because the sky is blue, it makes me cry" is the lyric in the famous Beatle's song used in "In the Arctic." Add to that – because the ice is melting – the tears that flow as a result may be our own, eventually.

"To the Arctic 3D" has a limited release in IMAX theaters on April 20th, including Chicagoland. Check local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring narration by Meryl Streep and songs by Paul McCartney. Written by Stephen Judson and directed by Greg MacGillivray. Rated "G"



[13]

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/greg-macgillivray>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/imax>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/meryl-streep>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
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- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/stephen-judson>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/to-the-arctic-3d>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/warner-bros-pictures>
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