

Cosmic confetti celebrates Hubble's 25th birthday

Star-spangled image released for anniversary of space telescope's launch.

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The star cluster Westerlund 2 (centre right) forms the dramatic focus for this image released to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the launch of the Hubble Space Telescope. The space shuttle Discovery carried Hubble into orbit on 24 April 1990.

Astronomers made this star-spangled picture by combining data from two of Hubble's most powerful instruments: the Advanced Camera for Surveys, which astronauts installed on the craft in 2002, and the Wide Field Camera 3, added during the very last trip to the telescope in 2009.

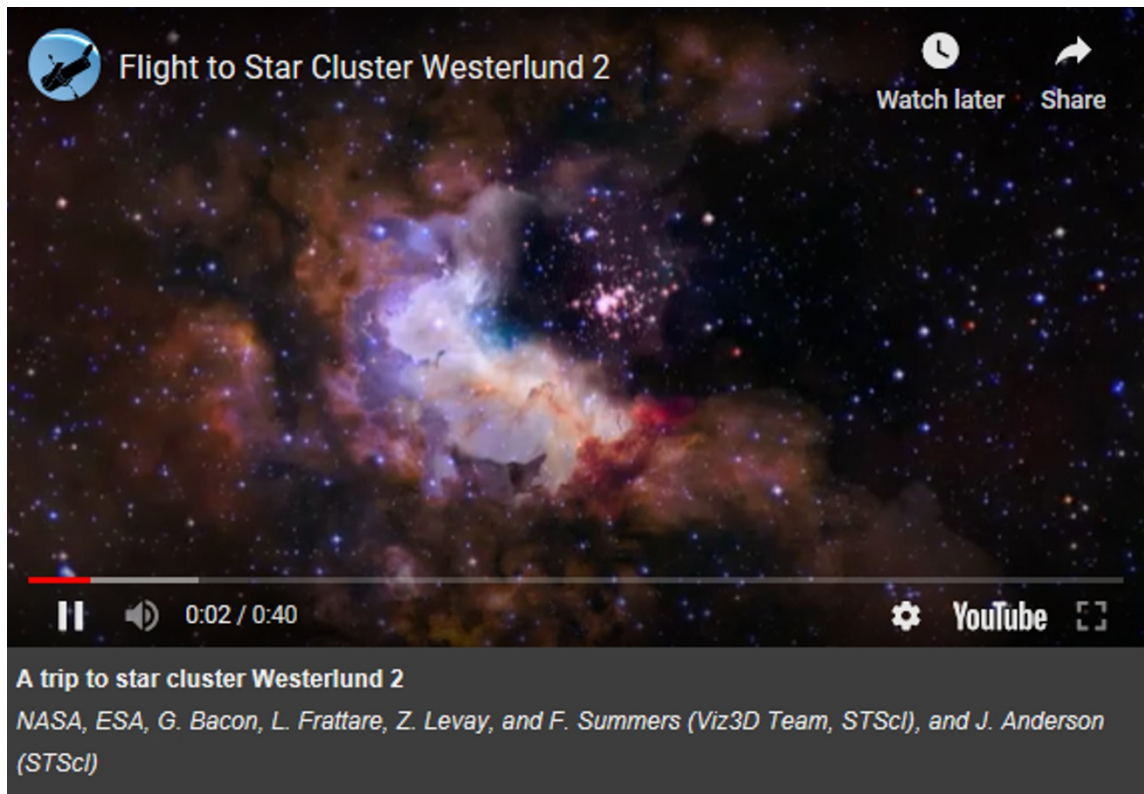
Westerlund 2 lies some 6,100 parsecs from Earth, in the constellation Carina. It contains thousands of stars that are about 2 million years old, including some of the brightest, most massive stars known in the Galaxy.

An accompanying video fly-through reveals a 3D view of pillars and filaments sculpted out of gas and dust in a nebula next to the cluster. Intense stellar winds from Westerlund 2 constantly plough into the gas and create shockwaves that trigger the birth of stars. The pillars serve as nurseries for the newborn stars, sheltering them from the blasts of ultraviolet radiation streaming out of the cluster. The faint red dots seen scattered throughout the image are stars so young that they have yet to begin burning hydrogen in their cores.



Nature special:
Hubble's 25th anniversary

Only Hubble's sharp eyesight, above the blurring effects of Earth's atmosphere, can reveal these cosmic wonders in such detail.



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