



Outdoor Musical Instruments
for Children's Museums

Museums, Music, and Memories

Providing musical experiences for family audiences is a valuable way to advance a thriving museum's mission, expand its audience, and strengthen its place within the community. Making music brings people together like nothing else. Offering quality musical opportunities - on real instruments – as exhibits that engage the entire family for spontaneous music-making provides a gateway to the performing arts and enhances family learning experiences.

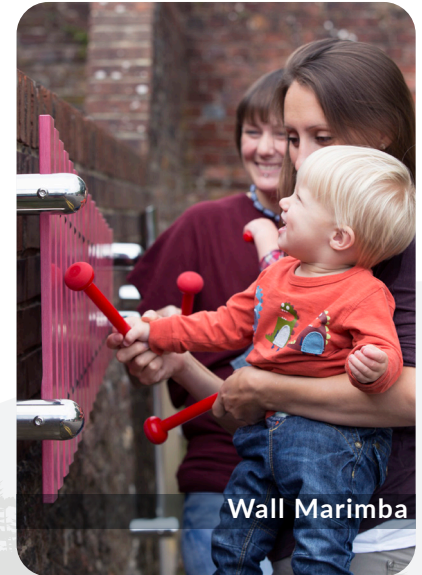
The interactions among family members spurred by a visit to the museum can create a greater sense of family connectedness. Today, family groups come in different shapes and sizes, from children visiting with their parents or grandparents and even great-grandparents to caregivers with children aging from babies to teens.



Cavatina



Pentatonic Tembós



Wall Marimba

Visiting museums with a multi-generational group can sometimes be challenging to keep the youngest in your group engaged at the same time as the older ones. Music has a universal appeal, and it successfully bridges intergenerational gaps. Children learn through play, experimentation, and watching and listening to the grownups they love. Setting an example as an enthusiastic participator in music activities is the best thing any parent or caregiver can do to help establish a child on the road to a lifelong love of music.

Percussion Play instruments are so simple and easy to play that anyone can create exciting and fresh melodies, regardless of age, ability, or experience – perfect for beginners and reluctant players.

Through musical play, you teach your child the power and value of music. The results will be a joyful, musical child, enhanced family relationships, and a strong musical community.

“Music helps children develop concentration, memory, and listening skills. In a free-play environment where there are no wrong notes, the experience can lead to a lifelong love of music and music-making.”

♪ Nancy Gastel ♪

Director of Santa Maria Valley Discovery Museum



Liberty Bells



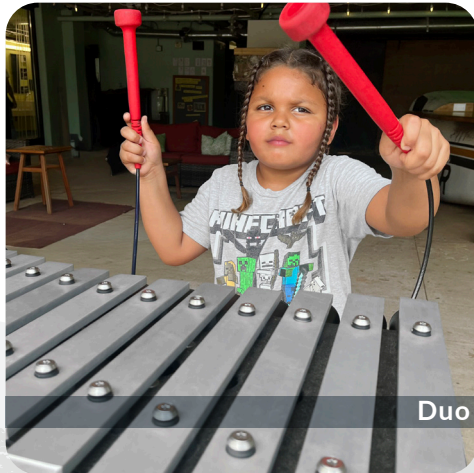
Bumblebee

Rhythms on the Rooftop with Madison Children's Museum, WI

A leading children's museum in Madison, Wisconsin, has introduced several outdoor musical installations to spark creativity, expression, and a love of music among children in the community.

Each music zone invites children to explore sound through play. Instruments include: The [Duo](#) Xylophone, located in the museum's outdoor Wonderland area, offers a shared musical experience for kids and families. Nearby, the [Rainbow Trio Ensemble](#) has been thoughtfully mounted on a colorful mural wall. Each instrument in the ensemble is painted in custom hues chosen to complement the mural, creating a vibrant, sensory-rich environment.

On the museum's rooftop garden, visitors can enjoy two more instruments. The [Cattail Chimes](#) provide a soothing, nature-inspired sound experience, while the [Large Babel Drum](#)—a steel tongue drum—produces soft, melodic tones perfect for calm, reflective play.



These musical zones are designed not only for fun but also to foster musical creativity and appreciation in a welcoming, communal setting.

Funded through generous community donations, these new musical spaces promote intergenerational play and connection between children and adults.

Outdoor musical play has well-documented benefits—promoting relaxation, reducing anxiety, and supporting emotional well-being across all ages.

Many of Percussion Play's instruments are pentatonically tuned, meaning they always sound harmonious. This accessibility allows every child to feel successful, including those who may face challenges in traditional learning or social settings. Music becomes a powerful tool for connection, confidence, and inclusion.

“Kids are great at exploring, improvising, and creating different sounds. Aside from the music program that I run, I’ll often find kids playing with them on their own, enjoying the tunes that they are creating.”

♪ Tim Gruber ♪

Volunteer Coordinator at Madison Children's Museum



Rainbow Trio Ensemble (Bespoke)



Cattails Set of 6

Outdoor Soundscape at Santa Fe's Children's Museum, NM

A small children's museum in Santa Fe has made the most of its outside space by creating a series of 'soundscapes' designed to encourage intergenerational play and learning. The museum has just over 10,000 sq ft inside, but outside, it has over an acre, so there was plenty of space to create something special.

The museum included instruments with different styles, colors, and shapes to encourage the kids to go out to play and have fun. Inside the soundscape, visitors will discover the [Rainbow Cavatina](#), [Congas Trio](#), [Penta Post](#), [Harmony Flowers](#), [Harmony Bells](#) and a [Petal Drum](#). Also, In one corner of the soundscape are the Stepping Stones, which children are surprised by as they run through the area. They are suddenly creating music with their steps!

Hannah Hausman, Executive Director of the Santa Fe Children's Museum, says, "Our new outdoor space is truly special. It was important for the learning experience to be intergenerational and organic. Children, parents, and caregivers of all ages can walk through and meander around the area—we designed it so they could come in through either path and discover the instruments organically."



NAMM's Museum of Music Making, CA

A museum in California that sees over 80,000 people a year come and celebrate the people and the products that bring music to our world is now encouraging visitors of all ages to come and enjoy its newly installed interactive Floor Piano.

Founded in 1998, the museum includes exhibitions, immersive experiences, programs, and live music, encouraging everyone to find—or to recognize—their own place in the world of making music.

On a tight deadline, the museum sought to add another instrument to its interactive gallery. They were looking for a durable instrument that would allow children to be active and use their bodies to create music. Alisa Mize, Development Officer at The Museum of Music Making, quickly identified Percussion Play's [Baby Floor Piano](#) as an option.

Once installed, Alisa was surprised by who was engaging with the piano. She says she thought there would be mainly young kids playing it, but she welcomed seeing people of all ages jump on the piano and make music. The Museum is a program division of the National Association of Music Merchants, a not-for-profit organization that serves and strengthens the global music products industry.

“Children with active energy levels enjoy the piano’s physical aspect as they can get their wiggles out, have some fun, and be introduced to different sounds.”

♪ Alisa Mize ♪

Development Officer at The Museum of Music Making



Baby Floor Piano

Musical Play at Louisiana Children's Museum, LA

Known as the birthplace of Jazz, New Orleans is a city where music can be heard on every street corner. Along with gospel and marching bands, the city now boasts outdoor musical instruments in the Louisiana Children's Museum.

The museum worked with landscape architect Tim Phillips, the owner and principal of Gyroscope, an award-winning museum planning, architecture, and exhibit design studio. Tim wanted to bring music to the space for many reasons, including New Orleans' rich history of communities gathering around music. Reflecting the museum's landscape and with a nod to the city's musical heritage, the museum has installed Percussion Play's outdoor instruments that are Inspired By Nature.

The perfect music-making spot is in the Music Hummock, designed as a glen with small trees dotted amongst 11 round [Babel Drums](#). The stainless-steel tongue drums are a mixture of heights and sizes, which create a playful area for hide and seek, where children can dip and dive between the drums and trees.

With pentatonic tuning, the drums can be played by many children all at once, producing a harmonious sound. The drums in the Music Hummock are both an attraction to explore deeper into the landscape (by hearing the music) and a delightful surprise to find beautiful instruments hidden in a kid-sized forest.



Small Babel Drum



Large Babel Drum



Small & Large Babel Drums

This type of collective music-making can build a sense of belonging. At Louisiana's Children's Museum, this is strengthened by the museum periodically inviting local drummers to join and create music. The Babel drums have brought the traditions of drum circles and the City's Congo Square to the museum.

In addition to the drums are the [Cattail Chimes](#) and [Liberty Bells](#), which are from the [Inspired by Nature range](#). The Cattails, also known as reeds or bullrushes, are instantly recognizable as slender marsh plants with tall stems and dark brown velvety heads. Stainless-steel 'stems' support the six light bronze cylindrical anodized aluminum chimes, which produce tranquil and harmonic sounds when struck with small soft green mallets.

Reminiscent of small grassland mushrooms, the Liberty Bells are located next to the Cattails near the Cloud Grasses at the museum. Set just across from the Music Hummock, the aluminum musical bells are tuned to the pentatonic c-major scale and 'sing' when struck with the attached mallets. Set side by side, both the Cattails and Liberty Bells can be played while overlooking the lagoon.

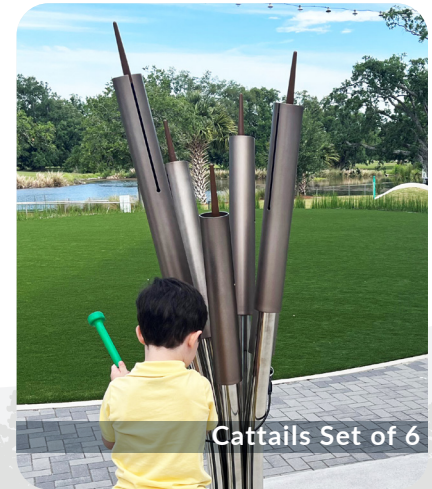
"Collaborative music-making always creates an energy and brings joy. Being able to discover it in the museum grounds just adds to the excitement."

♪ Tim Phillips ♪

Owner & Principal of Gyroscope Design Studio



Liberty Bells



Cattails Set of 6

Music and Butterflies at Children's Museum of the East End, NY

The Children's Museum of the East End, located in Bridgehampton, New York, received a musical ensemble as a result of winning a competition. Percussion Play, in partnership with the Association of Children's Museums, offered a free set of musical instruments to a children's museum in the US. The competition was held alongside the ACM's annual conference in New Orleans, and Leah Oppenheimer, the Director of Community Outreach at the museum, was selected as the winner in a random drawer. The result has provided children in the nearby area with the opportunity to learn and play music in the great outdoors.



The prize was the [Rainbow Trio Ensemble](#), which consists of the [Rainbow Bongos](#), [Rainbow Metallophone](#), and [Rainbow Chimes](#). These instruments are tuned to the pentatonic scale to create a safe musical haven for exploring new sounds in the fresh air. The prize also included a Penta Post, which is a cluster of five rainbow-colored chimes attached to a single post.

The instruments have been an instant hit with both museum guests and employees. Situated next to the butterfly garden, the museum team's offices look over the instruments, resulting in a melody of tunes drifting up to the office to be heard throughout the day.

For more than 20 years, Leah has been teaching music-making to both local and immigrant families. Her classes cater to infants, toddlers, and children, helping them discover the joy of music-making. Leah prefers using the instruments from Percussion Play because they enable players to create beautiful melodies that are always in tune.

"It's a joy to hear children and parents jamming together. Not only are they a hit with our guests- both children and parents, they're a hit with the entire team here! In my book, every children's museum should add these to their offering."

♪ Leah Oppenheimer ♪

Director of Community Outreach



Rainbow Trio Ensemble



Rainbow Metallophone

Musical Playground for Minnesota Children's Museum, MN

Minnesota Children's Museum offers its visitors a musical experience that is located in the 'Creativity Jam' musical playground. This playground features five Percussion Play instruments: [Tubular Bells](#), [Bell Lyre](#), [Large Babel Drum](#), [Harmony](#) and [Cajon](#). Visitors can now come and jam with family, friends, and other visitors.

The museum was keen to incorporate more music into the museum, recognizing that through musical play kids not only have fun, but also build upon and develop important life skills.

All the museum's exhibits are developed around the seven powers of play - the 7c's - seven lifelong skills they believe children need to thrive, now and throughout their lives:

Creative Thinking > Critical Thinking > (Self)-Control > Confidence > Collaboration > Communication and Coordination

The goal for any exhibit or program is to nourish the development of one or more of the seven powers of play in any way. Knowing that music helps develop confidence, creative and critical thinking, and communication skills, it made total sense to create a space for visitors to compose and play their own music in the 'Creativity Jam' zone.



Making Music at Building For Kids Children's Museum, WI

The Building For Kids Children's Museum is a not-for-profit organization that offers specially designed exhibits, programs, and family events that engage parents, empower children, and energize communities. Their programs and interactive exhibits inspire, teach, and reinforce curiosity.

Inside their Da Vinci Art Studio is a dedicated space for music where they decided to replace their broken instruments with durable instruments that sound beautiful and were not too loud.

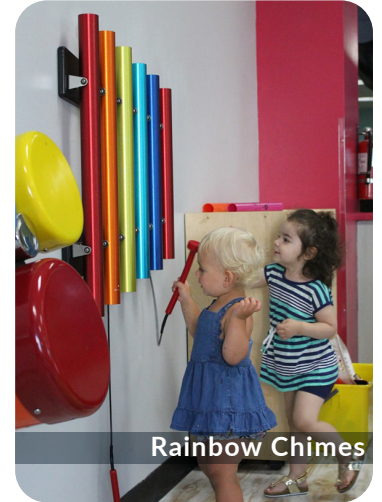
The [Rainbow Trio Ensemble](#) seemed to be the perfect match since it occupies less space than the full-size instruments, featured bright and eye-catching colors, and required less budget.

This ensemble features instruments tuned to the pentatonic scale, which means you can play around without hitting anything inordinately dissonant and there are no wrong notes perfect for encouraging improvisation and discovery.

"No matter how hard the kids bang on the instruments, it always sounds pretty and not obnoxious! Parents and kids interact together with the instruments. Sometimes we'll have a whole family band back there!"

♪ Bre Hauboldt ♪

Da Vinci Studio Coordinator at Building for Kids Children's Museum



Rainbow Chimes



Rainbow Metallophone

Striking a Chord at Baraboo Children's Museum, WI

When residents of Baraboo in Wisconsin decided to set up their own children's museum, they agreed on a mission to 'provide playful experiences that inspire and educate every child.' Today, this interactive museum in the heart of a small town with 13,000 residents is doing just this, and now with inclusive musical instruments!

The BCM Music Lab, designed for interactive play, now includes three new instruments inside. Although the Baraboo Children's Museum doesn't have any outdoor space, they realized that Percussion Play's outdoor musical instruments would be a great fit both inside and outside. Inside the lab, you will find two sets of chimes on the wall and a set of [bongos](#).

Although museum staff were worried that a Music Lab might be difficult in terms of the volume of the instruments, the soft tone of the instruments means music 'wafts' throughout the museum, creating a calming atmosphere. The Music Lab is a draw for everyone, creating playful experience for families and encouraging intergenerational play.

"We love seeing family members who are musically minded stop by and create music with their little ones. It's the start of the child's musical education."

♪ **Jed Crouse** ♪

Founder of Baraboo Children's Museum



Rainbow Bongos



Rainbow Bongos

Inclusive Music Garden for Play Sharity Children's Museum, NM

Play Sharity is the brainchild of five mothers who each had the same dream: to create a clean, interactive space for children to play, discover their talents, engage in learning, and promote family wellbeing. When Play Sharity Children's Museum and Resource Lending Library created a music garden, they fully expected the children to embrace the range of instruments. However, they hadn't prepared for how the garden could transform and promote intergenerational play opportunities within their community.

What was important for the museum when creating the music garden was that it was inclusive. Instruments have been installed so that wheelchair users could easily navigate the garden and have equal access to make music. Inside the music garden you will find the Harmony Flowers, Petal Drums, and the Rainbow Trio Ensemble.

The garden has transformed the outdoor space and, importantly, is a transitional space at the museum – allowing children to top off their visit and make some music before heading home.

"It is magical to see grandparents with young children connect over music. The music garden is the perfect place for children to top off their visits and make some music before heading home!"

♪ **Monica Topham** ♪

Executive Director at Play Sharity Children's Museum



Forget-Me-Not Petal Drum



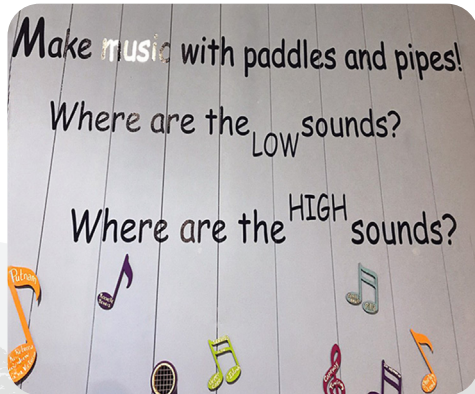
Rainbow Chimes

Music Room at Cape Cod Children's Museum, MA

A non-profit organization, the Cape Cod Children's Museum - the brainchild of three Falmouth women more than 20 years ago - is a place where families can learn and play together. Located in Mashpee, Massachusetts this 8,000 square-foot museum provides a learning environment that stimulates curiosity, creativity and imagination - inspiring children and their families to engage with each other, their community, and the world at large.

The Music Room at the Cape Cod Children's Museum has a variety of instruments for visitors to enjoy including a special [rainbow-coloured Sonora](#) located on the wall and a set of our very popular [Rainbow Samba drums](#). There are also plenty of toddler-friendly percussion instruments as well as a unique wall display of tuned PVC pipes - musical opportunities galore for children to explore, create and collaborate in spontaneous jam sessions or individual performances.

When asked why they thought it was so important to improve and expand the musical opportunities in the museum we were told: "Music ignites all areas of child development: intellectual, social and emotional, motor, language, and overall literacy. It helps the body and the mind work together".



Sensory and Inclusive Play

The very best children's museums offer inclusive experiences for a range of ages and abilities and excel in offering their guests easy access to their exhibits. Additionally, their focus on different physical and sensory needs for people living with autism, learning disabilities, and sensory impairments, as well as those with varying mobility requirements, makes them stand out in terms of inclusivity.

Outdoor musical instruments are a great way for families and guests to take a calm moment away from the excitement of the main attractions, decompress and experience a different kind of activity together that will make a great day out even better.

As stand-alone features, installed in calm, sensory-friendly areas, they offer a tranquil opportunity for parents, grandparents, or guardians to interact with their children. They provide a creative way for attractions to appeal to a wider range of guests with differing abilities and sensory needs.



Tropical Cyclone



Tubular Bells



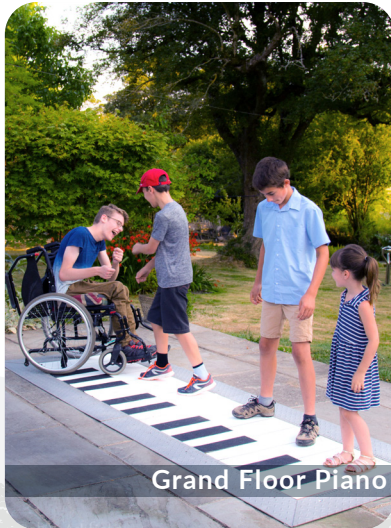
Papilio

Expand the Learning and Open those Outside Spaces!

In recent years, many of us have realized the importance of spending time in the great outdoors. As a result, outdoor spaces, regardless of their size, have become crucial areas for investment, promoting wellness, art, and strong family connections.

Several museums and attractions are now reconsidering their programs and shifting their focus toward outdoor spaces. They aim to provide open-air activities, exhibitions, and events to visitors who enjoy spending time outside with their families. This trend is gaining popularity as more people seek engaging experiences in the open air.

Creating outdoor music zones with interactive, holistic musical instruments that engage multiple senses can quickly transform any outdoor space into a lively area for spontaneous music-making.



Representing music-making from many cultures around the world, an outdoor music zone will invite children and their families to explore global music, rhythms, and movement while enjoying bursts of musical creativity.

One of the many benefits of outdoor musical instruments is they can be installed almost anywhere; on grass, on concrete, on decking, walls, or – in the case of the Floor Piano and Stepping Stones - even underground!

All instruments are intended to be played while standing on the ground, meaning they require no expensive impact-absorbing safer surfacing and very little routine maintenance.

The instruments will make robust interactive exhibits designed to withstand the elements and live outside all year to provide a fun, engaging family learning experience.

“Even if the children are all playing at once, it all sounds so nice - a beautiful sound comes out of the room. We have parents joining in too; it’s great for all ages and abilities”

♪ Tina Keegan ♪

Exhibits Director at Palo Alto Junior Museum & Zoo



Harmony Flowers



Harmony Hop



Congas Trio



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