Family Self-Guide: Music

If you enjoy both music and art you are sure to love this tour. Come, take a walk with us and listen to the rhythmic stylings of the museum!

Let’s start off with some classical music and take a look at the Fountain of Life (Nord Gallery).

Painted in bright colors and depicting rich fabrics, elaborate structures, and angelic musicians, this work suggests a celebration or royal ceremony. Beneath a group of heavenly thrones seating Jesus, Mary, and John the Evangelist, is a realm of angels playing instruments from the early Renaissance: the viol, organ, tromba marina, psaltery, harp, and lute. The tromba marina, the most unusual instrument of the group, is an ancestor of the modern day trumpet. The remaining angels gather in eaves and appear to be sing joyfully from prayer books.

For a more relaxing work, perhaps Mercury Putting Argus to Sleep is a better choice (Willard-Newell Gallery).

In Greek mythology, Jupiter takes the form of a cloud and seduces the young maiden Io. Jupiter’s jealous wife—the goddess Hera—catches him in the act and insists he give Io up. When Jupiter changes Io into a white cow to protect her, Hera demands the cow as a pet and places it under the watch of the giant Argus. Jupiter enlists the help of Mercury in rescuing Io. Disguised as a shepherd, Mercury sits down with Argus and begins to play his flute. As the song lulls Argus into a permanent slumber, Io is able to escape.

For those who want to see an actual instrument, be sure to stop by our Temple Bell (Sculpture Court).

While not the easiest of instruments to play (weighing in at over six hundred pounds!), this enormous bronze bell certainly is a conversation piece. It was made for the Temple of Great Mercy in the city of Hangzhou, China, where it called Buddhists to prayer. Like most traditional Chinese bells, it does not have a clapper; to ring it, the exterior surface has to be struck with a mallet. After the temple was taken down, the bell was donated to Oberlin College by an alumnus who hoped it would be rung during class reunions.
For those who march to the beat of a different drummer, try out our Kettledrum Organ (Stern Gallery).

Paul Klee is no stranger to music, having come from a very musically inclined family. His father was an organist, his mother was a singer and both parents taught music. Klee himself played the violin in an orchestra, so it is no surprise that his art explored music a great deal. During his last year teaching at the Bauhaus school in Dessau, Klee made this painting of a kettledrum organ. Although the two drumsticks topped with red and black balls and a wind-up handle help to identify the title instrument, the artist also used abstract shapes and shifting planes of light and color to represent the sound of music in this work.

Looking for something with a little soul? How about a Blue Guitar (Stern Gallery)?

The blue guitar sits on an oblong table surrounded by a pitcher and some grapes. Most of the work is painted in dark, cool colors with a gritty texture that give it an expressive quality. While the objects are easy enough to recognize, it is obvious given their distorted shapes that they could not be used in real life. Braque enjoyed experimenting with concepts of form and space in his work to encourage us to see everyday objects in new ways.

Art and music complement each others’ melodies nicely in the work Harmonizing (Ripin Print Gallery).

Using art as therapy for a wartime injury, Horace Pippin would paint by using his left hand to hold his right wrist, allowing his right hand to manipulate the brush. This strict control is evident in the use of strong vertical and horizontal lines in his work. While Pippin painted a number of subjects on abolitionism and the war, most of the subjects he painted were of everyday life in his hometown of West Chester, Pennsylvania. The street corner on which this barbershop quartet is busking was only a couple of blocks from the artist’s home.