



Outdoor Musical Instruments for
Libraries and Reading Gardens

Music & Reading Gardens

Libraries fuel inspiration, and the inclusion of musical play opportunities within their key asset – outdoor space – ensures libraries fulfill their missions to effectively serve patrons of all ages and abilities with their programming while breathing musical life into every corner of the USA.

Making music brings people together like nothing else, and offering quality musical opportunities - on real instruments - for spontaneous music-making - provides an activity that people of all ages and abilities can enjoy.



Over the past few years, we have worked with a number of forward-facing, transformative libraries of all scales and in all climates, who have utilized their outdoor spaces to create inspirational music gardens and courtyards that provide equity of access to participative music-making within their communities.

Libraries and music are both magnets for social connections. Reinventing an outdoor space to create music gardens, courtyards, or sensory spaces can help foster connections and focus on wellness - for visitors and staff. These spaces hold a special place within the community, and are a place where friendships are forged, people can develop or learn new skills, and performances can be held.

With the future of music and the arts under threat, libraries may hold the key to securing its long-term availability and in turn become the new champions of music for the young and the young at heart.

“The music garden has helped the library accomplish our vision to meet the lifelong learning and enjoyment needs of our citizens, and provides a fun and educational space outside of the building that is accessible to all”

♪ **Tony Howard** ♪

Director of Pickerington Public Library



Tumbadoras



Rainbow Cavatina



Daisy Petal



Harmony Hop



Harmony Flowers

Palm Harbor Library's Outdoor Music Garden, FL

Palm Harbor Library in Florida recently opened an outdoor music garden made possible through new funding. This idea arose during the COVID pandemic when the library's foot traffic decreased dramatically.

Palm Harbor Library has a history of promoting and supporting the visual and performing arts. Past and current collaborations include curated art pieces in the John Brock Art Alcove, a Children's Art MakerSpace, an outdoor sculpture, a partnership with the Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art, and a musical instrument collection for loan. The new outdoor musical garden is another example of their commitment to nurturing future musicians within the community and encouraging people of all ages and abilities to come together and be creative.



Rainbow Cavatina



Cyclone



Sunflower Petal Drum

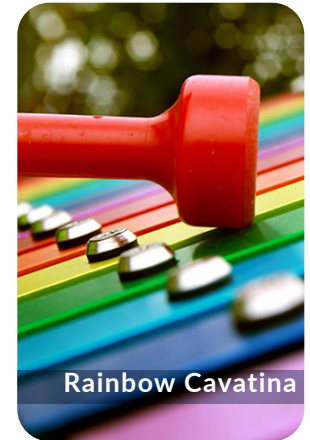
Gene Coppola, Library Director at Palm Harbor Library, comments, “When Covid occurred, not surprisingly, the library’s foot traffic decreased dramatically. The usage of many hands-on services declined, and library resources as a whole were impacted. It was during this dark time that opportunity rather than despair presented itself. It got the staff thinking in new ways about how best we can still serve; how to overcome these obstacles to accessibility. One way was to create a drive-thru window, and the other was an outdoor musical garden. The thinking for the latter was that since there was still a concern about entering a building where many people may be congregating, why not offer a service where residents can still enjoy the arts? And like that, the “Musical Garden” was born!”

Six outdoor instruments from Percussion Play were installed along the library’s west side adjacent to the “Reading Garden.” These instruments were the [Bell Lyre](#), [Rainbow Cavatina](#), [Cyclone](#), [Rainbow Bongos](#), [Sunflower Petal Drums](#), and [Harmony Bells](#).

The library’s new addition were made possible through the estate of Dorothy & Frank Greenstreet, two community members who have given much to the library over the years. Their musical contributions through various programs accentuated the importance of the arts, providing so much pleasure to so many.



Petal Drum



Rainbow Cavatina



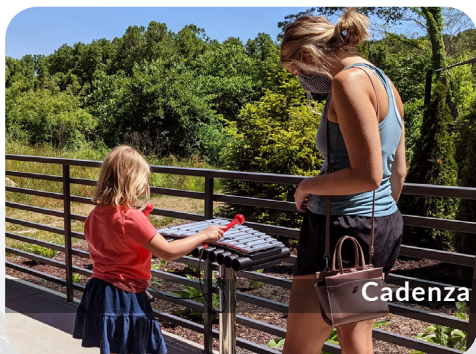
Bell Lyre

Scenic Regional Library, MO

Scenic Regional Library consists of nine branches across the three counties, with the Union branch being the first library to benefit from outdoor musical instruments. When the new building was built for the Union branch, this included a brand-new space for children where the library aimed to develop pre-literacy skills. Having come across Percussion Play instruments at an event, the library board fell in love with the idea of creating a space, especially for outdoor musical instruments, for everyone to enjoy.

The library was fortunate to receive money to purchase the first set of instruments, a [Soprano Quartet Ensemble](#). This ensemble includes the [Cadenza](#), a [Small Babel Drum](#), and [Soprano Pentatonic Freechimes](#). Everyone at the library, from children to elderly patrons, are enjoying discovering new sounds. The 'All Abilities Rainbow Center,' which helps adults with learning difficulties, regularly enjoys their interaction with the instruments.

Christy Schink, Associate Director of Youth and Outreach Services Librarian, says “It’s so lovely to hear chimes outside. The noise created by children playing the instruments provides a pleasant background noise at the library. There were concerns about how loud the noise might be, but the sound doesn’t carry, and we all enjoy the gentle chimes”.



Hubbard Public Library's Storywalk®, OH

Mary Anne Russo, Children's Librarian at HPL, had her sights on Percussion Play's outdoor musical instruments, and after a successful fundraiser, community members are now enjoying playing music on its permanent 'StoryWalk®' on the grounds of the library.

As a volunteer, Cynthia Hirtzel helps the library to fund projects. After seeing Percussion Play's instruments, Cynthia also realized they would be perfect for encouraging children to spend time outside, away from technology and screens, and reconnect with nature.

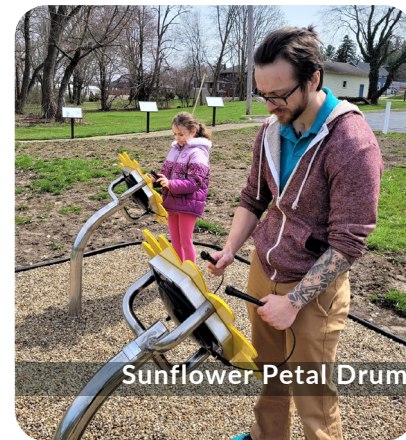
The instruments were installed and ready to use in November, and even though it was very cold, they quickly became one of the most popular activities in the garden. The instruments include the [Sunflower Petal Drums](#), which children love.

But it's not just children who enjoy the instruments; everyone who comes to the library and even those who don't have a library card can come and create music. Being located at the entrance to the library means everyone sees them, and even when the library isn't open on a Sunday, families come together to make music.

"It's all about democratizing music, and we are especially pleased about how accessible the instruments are. They are truly for everyone"

♪Cynthia Hirtzel♪

Volunteer at Hubbard Public Library



Clinton Macomb Public Library, MI

The new North Branch of the Clinton-Macomb Public Library opened its doors in September 2021 and included sizeable outdoor spaces such as courtyards, a patio area, and shady porticoes. Keen to introduce intergenerational and collaborative play and make the outside space as attractive to patrons as the indoors, a communal area was created with outdoor musical instruments from Percussion Play.

As well as intergenerational and collaborative play, the committee had a series of other goals they wanted the new musical space to achieve. For example, promoting reading differently with sheet music, helping young children develop gross and fine motor skills, and reinforcing the library as a source of lifelong learning in the community.

Clinton-Macomb has now created an opportunity for library users to create a “spark of joy at arriving and upon leaving.” Library Director Larry Neal says it’s a way to entice people to use the exterior of the library in addition to the interior and encourage people who wouldn’t usually access the library’s facilities. Larry also explains that “Our outdoor musical instruments were an instant hit with library patrons of all ages. From spontaneous ‘concerts’ to a simple tap of delight on a drum, these have brought a wonderful sense of joy to the community.”



Rainbow Sambas



Penta Post



Large Babel Drum



Cavatina

Bethlehem Public Library, NH

The Bethlehem Public Library was founded by Mrs. Presby of Littleton in New Hampshire with \$1.00 and just one book. Fast forward to 2022, where there are considerably more books, the StoryWalk® trail, a perennial garden, and a new music garden.

Since the pandemic, the library has focused on incorporating more activities into its ample outdoor space. The team noticed that many patrons were not entering the building due to health worries. Laura Clerkin, Director of the library, had seen outdoor musical instruments on a river walk in her hometown and thought they would be the perfect fit for Bethlehem Public Library's backyard.

The library installed the [Calypso Quatro Post](#), and today parents bring children to the library to play and begin to learn about making music outdoors. Specifically chosen because they are easy to play and always sound soothing, Laura says, "I chose more bell tones because I knew we'd have a lot of kids playing them, and they always sound nice no matter how you play."

Alongside the Music Garden, the library plans to create a 'perennial garden,' with benches and picnic tables.

"People of all ages enjoy playing our outdoor musical instruments. We aim to expand our Music Garden soon with three more instruments"

♪ Laura Clerkin ♪

Director of Bethlehem Public Library



North Mankato Taylor Library, MN

Thanks to an Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund grant, North Mankato Taylor Library can now include music-making within its interactive programming. The new musical garden is proudly located outside the library's entrance and includes [Rainbow Sambas](#), [Rainbow Cavatina](#), and [Duo](#) xylophone.

Outdoor musical instruments are an excellent way to increase libraries' cultural capacity and community profile and encourage new patrons and visitors to join, especially young people and families.

Recognizing the benefits that music has on early literacy development, a music and reading garden can help libraries extend their programming to include music-making for young children.

Opportunities for playing with sound and rhythm outdoors will help promote language acquisition, listening skills, memory, and motor skills. "We are grateful to the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund for the grant that made this project possible," says Katie Heintz, Library Director for the City of North Mankato. "I would also like to thank City staff for installing the equipment. We are excited to bring this fun, bright addition to North Mankato for residents to enjoy."



White Plains Library, NY

What was once a dreary concrete slab outside the White Plains Library is now a calm, inviting open space – a green oasis in one of the city’s busiest sections - featuring gardens, benches, trees, energy-efficient lighting, and outdoor musical instruments.

The plaza welcomes commuters, jurors, court workers, and library patrons to take a stroll and a breath of fresh air, enjoy lunch and relax by playing music on the [Bell Lyre](#), [Pentatonic Symphony Freechimes](#), and [Emperor Chimes](#).

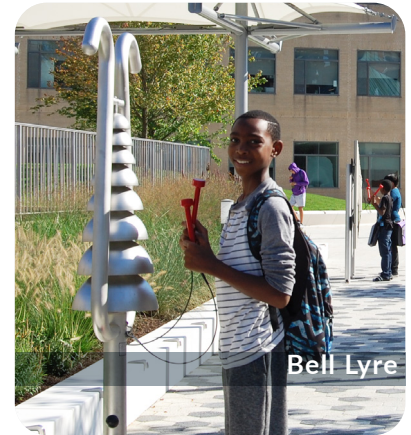
Their choice of instruments complements the “discovery garden,” designed by the library to create a sensory experience for young children, with various plantings and objects that appeal to all five senses, including herbs, lavenders, and ornamental trees. The contemporary outdoor instruments chosen are sculptural, creative, and intended for all musical abilities and ages.

“With the renovation project, this space has been completely transformed. The city’s goal was to enhance this space so that the public, whether office workers from nearby buildings, patrons of the library, residents, members of the public, young or old, would feel welcome and comfortable here.” Karen Pasquale, senior advisor to White Plains Mayor.

“It is more than just functional. It brings warmth and humanity to this vacant space.”

♪ Mayor Tom Roach ♪

Mayor of White Plains



Bell Lyre



Pentatonic Freechimes

Pickerington Public Library, OH

Pickerington Public Library (PPL), determined to stay ahead of the curve, extended and created a Music Garden to ensure it continued as a modern community resource for all ages. Since creating its Music Garden, the PPL has integrated the musical instruments into many of its programs, including literacy programs 'Beyond Abilities' (learning opportunities for adults with disabilities) and Sensory Stories and Play, an early literacy class specifically designed for children with special needs.

"Research shows that music can enhance fine and gross motor skills, support social and emotional development, improve spatial-temporal awareness and build language literacy skills," Tony Howard, Director of PPL, says.

The Music Garden isn't just for library programs; it's also a resource for pure joy. Bauman has witnessed groups of teens showing off their musical abilities, and Howard says he often sees parents and kids out there enjoying the instruments regardless of the weather. Howard and Bauman say it's also a great stress reliever. "It's fun, it's just fun," Bauman adds. "There is a release that you feel any time you play a musical instrument."



Oil City Library, PA

The choice to construct a music garden with money gifted to the library at first seemed at odds with the library's purpose: to lend books and provide a quiet place to study or read. But, like many libraries across the country, the Oil City Library has worked hard to adapt to changing times.

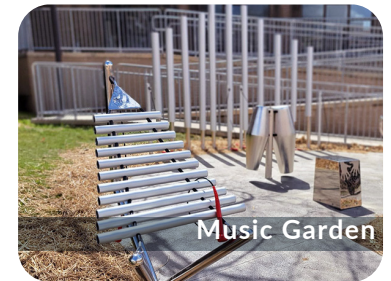
Director Dan Flaherty has seen the value of the Oil City library shift in its status as a community gathering space, and this is where Dan saw the value of a music garden in the front courtyard.

The new music garden comprises a collection of Percussion Play outdoor musical instruments: a [Rainbow Cavatina](#) and [Music Book](#), [Cherub](#), [Harmony](#), [Colossus Chimes](#), and three different types of drums; [Cajons](#), a pair of [Tumbadoras](#), and a [Large Babel Drum](#). Many of the instruments are tuned to easy-to-play pentatonic scales that make them so ideal for the outdoor space. With people inside the library quietly engaged in their activities, the music garden needed to produce calm, beautiful sounds. Built between the YMCA and a local coffee shop, the garden attracts families, dog walkers, and people on their way to the library or anywhere else.

“It is wonderful to watch these spaces evolve to meet the community’s needs through hosting concerts, renting out new technologies, or simply providing a place where families can come and make music.”

♪ Dan Flaherty ♪

Oil City Library Director



5 Reasons to Create an Outdoor Music Space at your Library

- ♪ A space where people of all ages and abilities can come to create music together. Music can bring a diverse group of people together in the community simply because it transcends language limitations. It provides its own language of rhythm and melody to enable players and users to communicate with each other non-verbally.
- ♪ The use of the pentatonic scale in many of the instruments addresses feelings of inadequacy by being so simple and easy to play; just play around and never hit anything inordinately dissonant in a safe musical haven. The technique is not a problem, given the simplicity of the instruments. Dissonance is not a problem, given the pentatonic scale – perfect for beginners and reluctant players.



Liberty Bells



Papilio



Djembes

♪ Music ignites all areas of child development: intellectual, social and emotional, motor, language, and overall literacy. Few things stimulate the brain the way music does. Making music develops important skills essential for success in life, such as concentration, confidence, and self-esteem. Music sessions can be tailored to look specifically at language, listening skills, or turn taking.

♪ Outdoor musical instruments can be used to integrate children’s literature into music time by adding songs and sound effects to the stories and acting them out and awaken the imaginations. For children who may struggle with reading, or see it as more of a challenge – what a great way to draw the fun out of books and inspire a fresh, exciting way to engage with them: finding the melodies between the words!

♪ An invitation to experience the outdoors in a new and fascinating way, encouraging people of all ages and abilities to step outside into the fresh air and find a little harmony. Playing music helps to improve concentration, increases mobility and coordination, it reduces tension and promotes relaxation - plus the added benefits of being in the fresh air!

“We were looking for something to pull people out onto our outdoor patios in our new buildings, and these have been perfect. The company is great to work with and their products are exceptionally high quality.”

♪ **Christy Schink** ♪

Associative Director of Youth and Outreach Services at Scenic Library Missouri



Small Babel Drum



Grand Floor Piano

TM



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