

AUGUST 19TH, 2020

STAY AT HOME SYMPHONY!

Found Objects Orchestra & Conduction Activity (Ages 3-8)



Step by Step Instructions:

- Take a look around your home for random items you think might easily be transformed into sound making machines. Toilet paper tubes, tinfoil take out containers, old keys, dry macaroni, and empty egg cartons are some of the things we've collected.
- Pull out your art supplies and get crafty! Try attaching objects together to create new instruments. You might also attach string to hang the instrument or make a handle out of tape to hold the instrument. Imagine how you might drum on something, blow through something, strum something...what cool sounds can your found objects make? Perhaps you hook elastic bands onto nails to create something you can strum, cut or, alternately, glue tubes together to create different sounding 'horns,' or dangle old keys or tinfoil take-away containers from strings to create chimes or cymbals. Anything goes! Once you've adapted your instruments into sound making machines, you can decorate them however you like; with paint, sparkles, stickers, string, you name it! The more colourful, the better.

OVERVIEW:

From finding objects around the house (the recycling and 'junk drawer' are treasure troves!) to turning them into musical instruments and decorating them, to composing a symphony, to conducting the final performance! Kids will find a huge amount of joy in leading this activity, stretching their imaginations, turning up their ears, and exploring their sound art potential. The instruments can be any sound making objects the imagination finds potential in. The symphony is a framework: a storyline with a beginning, middle, and end, depicted in a graphic score. The children will create the work and adults simply facilitate as much or as little as is necessary, based on the child/children. The final performance consists of the child/children using basic hand signals, cue cards, or words to cue the orchestra of musicians premiering the Stay at Home Symphony on their newly minted 'found object' instruments.

(Instructions, cont.)

- Next, you'll need some coloured pencils and a big piece of paper to compose your graphic score. For this step, imagine the sounds you'd like to hear and what drawings might match up with those sounds. I've included some examples below. You might give each found object instrument that you've created its own colour on the score, so that when the player of that instrument sees their colour, they know it's their turn to play. Or, you might draw a bunch of different shapes that can be interpreted by the musicians in your Stay at Home Symphony as sounds. A lot of dots or short lines might mean really percussive staccato (short) sounds on the instruments. Swirly circles or long lines might mean more connected sounds.



You can use height in your drawing, too. High sounds could be indicated with markings higher up on the page and low sounds could be low on the page. Different colours could be used to tell the players what kinds of sounds to play. Or, you could simply draw an idea of what you want to hear and use hand signals to point to the musician you want to play and how you want them to make their instrument sound in that moment.

- Lastly, set up a space for your big concert! You'll need at least one person to play your instruments, but, preferably, you'll gather your family or friends together and have one person playing each instrument. You'll be the conductor!



Instructional Video Links:

[Video 1: Instrument Making](#)

[Video 2: Performance!](#)

A personal experience...

I first taught this Found Objects Orchestra and Conduction project to a day camp of preschool aged children at a music school where I used to work teaching mostly violin. I drew from my experience as an improviser, my knowledge of graphic score composition, and my brief introduction to John Zorn's composition, *Cobra*, which utilizes a system of conduction hand symbols and cue cards. All of these things mixed with the playfulness, zeal, and chaos that any room full of preschoolers will bring came together to create a magical performance built from the ground up, cooperatively, by the children themselves. In the end, our classroom resembled a fantastical scene akin to something out of a Dr. Zeuss book, with colourful homemade instruments hanging from the ceiling, stretched from wall to wall, and balanced on chairs. The performers were assigned an initial station equipped with an instrument to make sound with and then each child rotated through the stations and took turns at the conductor's "podium." When at the helm, so to speak, the conductor could use any means of communication they wanted to convey the sounds they desired from the performers. All in all, we had a blast making improvised music in the moment and exercising our creative minds. The children gained so much from the experience and came away from their final performance glowing with excitement and a sense of accomplishment as a group.