

GOING ON FAITH



Noteworthy Collections at Music Museums

By [Penny Musco](#) | March 11, 2020

Researchers believe that we humans crooned before we spoke, making music our earliest and most instinctive vocalization. Studies also indicate that music has a powerful effect on our brains. Hearing rhythm and rhyme from our past immediately transports us back to specific moments and circumstances and their accompanying emotions.

In addition, songs evoke deep feelings we can't always articulate. "Where words fail," author Hans Christian Andersen observed, "music speaks."

And sometimes, it just makes us want to dance.

Which is why visiting museums that focus on music is a terrific multisensory group adventure. Here are five that showcase American, as well as international, musical forms.

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum

Cleveland

Buddy Holly, the Ramones, Run DMC: They and many, many others appear over seven floors in the striking Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum on Cleveland's Lake Erie shore. It's a high-energy feast for the eyes and ears, unfolding the story of rock from its beginnings through its numerous iterations.

John Goehrke, director of fan engagement and onstage experience, recommended a stop at the Garage, where visitors can jam by themselves or with others. Along with the Hall of Fame Gallery on Level 3, he also suggested “The Power of Rock” exhibit, which includes a film that immerses viewers in induction ceremony performances. The “Play It Loud” exhibit, running through September 13, features iconic rock instruments.

This year is the Hall of Fame’s 25th anniversary, and Goehrke promised lots of great celebrations during its busy season, April through October. Between the Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends, there will be live music nearly every day.

Groups can take advantage of discounted admission tickets, as well as several hotel and experience packages. The most popular, for 30 or more group members of any age, is the Music Box Supper Club, according to group sales manager Yvette Phillips. It includes lunch and dinner options, plus a customizable musical experience. The Rockin’ Good Time cruise can be scheduled Tuesday through Sunday from June 15 through Labor Day, then Friday through Sunday until the end of September for adult groups of 20 or more.

Want to strut your stuff? Choirs, bands and ensembles can perform weekdays on the exterior plaza with advance scheduling. rockhall.com

Grammy Museum

Los Angeles

You’ve seen the annual televised award show. Now learn about the artists who collect the trophies, plus much more, at the Grammy Museum in downtown Los Angeles. Four levels of aural and visual displays cover the history and legacy of 150 American music genres, President Michael Stika pointed to the “Culture Shock” interactive exhibit as a centerpiece attraction.

“It talks about how music has changed culture throughout the past several decades,” he said.

Of the more than 400 artifacts, Stika mentioned a couple of standouts. A colorful tuxedo worn by Ray Charles is one of his favorite pieces. “The other thing that we have that a lot of museums don’t are handwritten lyrics,” he said, reeling off such well-known names as Paul McCartney and Dolly Parton.

Groups of 10 or more enjoy discounted tickets, while 60- to 90-minute guided tours are offered for groups of 15 to 20 for an additional charge. Many groups pair tours with a screening of the film “The Making of a Grammy Moment.” It’s a backstage peek at the 50th Grammy Awards, from nomination announcement to rehearsals to live performances. grammymuseum.org

Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum

Nashville, Tennessee

At the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tennessee, the exploration of country music starts with the building's symbol-laden facade. Windows indicate black piano keys, the wall's curving flourish the fins of a 1950s Cadillac. The Rotunda represents railroad water towers and rural silos, with upright bars rendering the staff notes of "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," the signature song of country music's first family: the Carters. Tiers allude to the progress of recording technology, and the radio tower is a nod to WSM, the station most influential to country music's growth.

Inside, the celebration of Southern culture continues with the Mike Curb Conservatory's "welcoming porch," constructed using regional materials. Water features reference the cradles of country music: Appalachians streams and the Mississippi Delta.

The core exhibit is "Sing Me Back Home: A Journey Through Country Music," an interactive look at the genre's history. Other display subjects include Kacey Musgraves, through June 7, and "Brooks and Dunn: Kings of Neon," ending July 19. Husband and wife Boudleaux and Felice Bryant, composers of over 6,000 songs, have their own exhibit through August 2.

The "American Currents: State of the Music" exhibit focuses on Chris Stapleton, Martina McBride and Bill Anderson, sequentially.

"Each of these artists achieved country music stardom in a different era, and each has a compelling story to tell," said museum CEO Kyle Young. Live performances, film screenings and other programming are scheduled throughout the year.

Groups can sign on for several diverse programs at the museum, such as co-writing and producing a song from scratch, or experiencing the 1970s Outlaw scene with Waylon Jennings' former band members. Also popular are museum-run tours of nearby RCA Studio B, Nashville's oldest lasting recording studio. countrymusichalloffame.org

Motown Museum

Detroit

Stop in the name of love to see what's going on at Hitsville U.S.A., birthplace of Motown Records. Groups might find themselves dancing in the street to tunes from such musical luminaries as the Supremes, Marvin Gaye, and Martha and the Vandellas when they visit the Motown Museum in Detroit..

Belt out a few numbers in Studio A, where superstar musicians perfected the Motown Sound, which chief operating officer Sara Azu described as “soulful vocals sung over pop melodies and played on top of R&B instrumentation.” The “Boulevard to Broadway” exhibit tells how Berry Gordy put together his company of top African American artists during an era of deep racial turmoil.

Additional displays include artifacts, photos and other mementos from the Motown era. Beginning in April, the museum will host a retrospective on Jim Hendin, who photographed several Motown album covers. Upstairs is an apartment where Gordy and his family once resided. A 50,000-square-foot museum expansion is in the works that will include recording studios and a performance theater.

Groups of 20 or more must preregister to receive discounted admission for a guided tour. Summer slots fill up quickly, Azu said. motownmuseum.org

Musical Instrument Museum

Phoenix

The Musical Instrument Museum is home to over 7,000 instruments from approximately 200 locations around the globe, divided into geographic sections.

“There isn’t another museum anywhere in the world that has the scope of instruments and music that we do,” said group sales coordinator Ida Jones. “But we’re very easy to navigate.” What’s also unique about the museum, she said, is that “you see a video of how those instruments are played, then listen to them” through a sophisticated system of wireless hot spots. And then you can try out many of them in the Experience Gallery.

Mechanical instruments from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as player pianos and music boxes, get their own space. The Conservation Lab window provides a view into the delicate art of restoration and repair.

Adult group tours accommodate 10 to 120 people. A VIP tour presents a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the collection and the Mim Music Theater. For an uplifting experience, book the Balloons and Tunes package, which incorporates a morning hot-air-balloon ride, a postflight champagne and gourmet breakfast, a three-hour museum visit and a voucher for lunch at its cafe, all transfers included. mim.org

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