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Hipsqueak By TOC Kids staff

Exhibit preview | “Sonic Sensation” at the Kohl Children’s Museum

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“Sonic Sensation” at Kohl Children’s Museum.

Photo: Max Herman

It’s that time of year again: Bullying winds and unforgiving snow threaten Chicagoland kids with cabin fever. Luckily the Kohl Children’s Museum has a remedy or two up its sleeve, including a new exhibit that opened Tuesday, which allows little learners to explore sound through senses other than hearing.

On loan from the Sciencenter science museum in Ithaca, NY, “Sonic Sensation” allows young ears, eyes and hands to learn about sound elements and hearing through interactive activities. Housed in an open area in the back of the museum, the first stop in the exhibit’s 11 hands-on stations is “How Does The Ear Hear?,” where kids can learn about sound waves and how they create a chain reaction of activity from the ear to the brain. Along with checking out a large replica of the human ear, kids can launch a billiard ball into four other multi-colored spheres to create a chain reaction.

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More stuff to push, turn and watch awaits wee ones at the “Seeing Sound” station, where a large clear tube containing kidney bean-sized foam pieces is held between two vibrating speakers. The big, shiny START button and swivel knobs on the station’s control panel lures children to manipulate the frequency and amplitude of the vibrations, making the pieces jiggle and take the shape of sound waves.

The “Invisible Orchestra” station invites children to strut, jump and moonwalk across a music scale carpet—just like Tom Hanks and Robert Loggia in the movie *Big*—while checking out their live compositions on a television screen in front of them. Adults and older kiddos can check their ears at the “Hearing Test” station, where headphone-wearing test takers listen for sounds at various frequency levels and different volumes to see how they stack up against young ears.

Germaphobe parents will rest a little easier knowing the exhibit’s buttons, knobs and anything touchable are sanitized on a daily basis, though a thorough hand washing is always encouraged after a day of interactive play. And be sure to hit up the “Music Makers” permanent exhibit next door, where younger kids can jam on instruments, compose their own music and boogie some more.

“Sonic Sensation” runs through May 17 at the Kohl Children’s Museum. Visit kohlchildrensmuseum.org for more information.