

Finding Harmony with Freenotes Instruments

Welcome to the world of Freenotes Harmony Park, where there are no wrong notes. Music is the universal language, which bridges gaps between cultures, age, and physicality. It creates a sense of community, connection, and belonging. The pure musical tones generated by Freenotes instruments create an instantaneous response of joy.

Created by Grammy Award-winning musician Richard Cooke, Freenotes Harmony Park instruments are real musical instruments that can be used to play intuitional music by people of all ages and abilities. They are set up so there is no tuning needed, and no difficult movements are required to play them. These percussion instruments make musical expression available to anyone, regardless of physical or cognitive ability. Because of their simplicity, accessibility, and beautiful design, Freenotes Harmony Parks are ideal places for music therapy interventions.

A Sensory Panorama for People with Special Needs

Freenotes instruments are being used therapeutically with disabled people and the elderly, to treat Asperger's, Autism, Dementia, and the spectrum of Sensory Processing Disorders. According to Dr. Lucy Miller of the SPD Foundation, "children with Sensory Processing Disorders do not process sensations the way you or I do. The sympathetic nervous system is the part of your brain that has a 'fight or flight' reaction to sensation. We see this often in our children: they get a sound, they get a touch that's unexpected, we see a 'fight or flight' reaction. With the instruments we never see those kinds of reactions. The children are much more calm, and much more in a place where the brain is ready to learn." By combining sound with movement in a truly interactive way, Freenotes instruments support the establishment of positive responses to stimuli.

She goes on to say, "Learning, having harmony, feeling lucky, experiencing contentment and joy are among the most important features of life...I think it's about letting go of societal expectations and just being OK "just being." It's about "hanging out" instead of taking lessons; it's about playing "just to play" instead of to get better at some skill or to win."

Supporting Sensory Stimulation

Freenotes Harmony Park instruments provide a safe and enjoyable means of stimulating the senses, including auditory, vestibular, proprioceptive, and visual systems. This is particularly important for children with Sensory Processing Disorders. The pleasing sounds generated by playing these ergonomically-designed percussion instruments can motivate a child to expand his or her limited movement vocabulary in order to attain more sounds, thus encouraging balance and improved spatial orientation. Adding auditory input while moving (making music by striking a surface with a mallet) creates positive arousal for those with Sensory Under-Responsivity. Interacting with Freenotes instruments engages the large muscles of the body as the player moves from one place to another during play, and when they use the mallets to generate sound. Clinically, this type of input is seen to calm children who are over-responsive, and the production of tones in conjunction with movement is seen to calm children who crave sensation.

Assisting with Motor Skills and Discrimination

Movement of the body while playing Freenotes instruments as well as the finer motor action of swinging mallets to create musical tones provides maximum amounts of input to the body. This improves body awareness and allows a child to practice refining their movements in space. Vestibular discrimination is engaged when the child is distinguishing between fast and slow movement while playing the instrument, either independently or in conjunction with other players. Auditory discrimination is necessary to differentiate the pitch of the tones produced while striking the various keys on a Freenotes instrument.

Patricia Jones of Teacher Support Force, observed this about the ease of playing Freenotes instruments: “Without question the best resource I have ever seen for nurturing the musician in every child are Harmony Park outdoor instruments and playgrounds by Freenotes. The instruments are designed by Richard Cooke, who feels that everyone can and should be a musician, even without formal training.”

Promoting Social Development and Communication

People of all ages and abilities can play together effortlessly because Freenotes instruments are designed to have complementary scales, encouraging creative, tactile play. A child can explore Freenotes instruments independently, or can interact for social stimulation by playing together with others. Games can be built around Freenotes instruments that encourage engagement with peers, increased sense of safe physical proximity, and a shared experience of joyful harmony. This helps children to develop a sense of comfort and confidence in their movements, leading to improved self-esteem. Increased communication and cooperative play can lead to improved social participation, decreased distractibility, and positive reciprocal interaction.

Sheryl Benjamin, Executive Director of the SPD Foundation’s STAR Center, shared these thoughts about Freenotes instruments: “Our children have sensory issues, which often lead to behavior problems, isolation, and problems with socialization. Our therapy is directed to working with the family to build self-esteem and socialization, so they can function more typically. STAR Center therapists find that [Freenotes instruments] help the children implement rhythms, which can help calm them. One dad and his 4-year-old child began a game of fast/slow and high/low. This was a child who could hardly interact with the dad. It was wonderful.”

Accessibility, Safety, and Ease of Play

Freenotes Harmony Park instruments utilize the simplest of motor skills to allow anyone to make pleasing music. They are carefully designed to have angles that maximize ease of play. A cornerstone of the Freenotes design esthetic is visual variety in instrument shape and size, which promotes exploration and a sense of wonder. Freenotes Harmony Parks

are outdoor spaces that encourage social interaction in a colorful, visual stimulating, and spontaneous environment. Because the mallets are attached to the instruments, each is instantly accessible for play. Children are inspired to experiment and try each instrument to discover what kind of sounds they can create. Freenotes instruments provide stimulation to the auditory system and cognitive functioning. The number of other individuals involved in playing a Freenotes instrument can be adjusted to fit the experiential needs of each child, creating a sense of safety in shared space. Such fun and successful peer interactions result in enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem.

Ideal for Older Adults

Issues of self-awareness and diminished communication skills can create a sense of isolation in older adults. Loss of mobility, illness, depression, and the need to restore faith and hope in individuals can be addressed through therapy in music and art. Music therapy has proven effective in stimulating memory recall, which contributes to reminiscence and satisfaction with life. Positive changes in mood and emotional states, along with a sense of control over life situations have been observed. Music therapy results in reduced anxiety and stress, and assists in pain management. It promotes rhythmic and sustained physical movement and vocal fluency as an adjunct to physical rehabilitation, and offers opportunity for social interaction. Music can reach even those seniors resistant to other treatment approaches due to the familiarity, predictability, and feelings of security associated with music. Because Freenotes Harmony Park instruments are wheelchair accessible and require no strenuous movements to play, they are ideal for older adults with physical limitations that might make it impossible for them to play traditional instruments that require balance and fine motor skills.

“The degree to which function can be recovered is phenomenal, and we are just tapping in to the extent that we can get recovery following stroke or injury or disease. We hope that music might play a particularly important role in helping the regeneration of those cells, in helping the individual learn to interpret the pattern and essentially to help that person learn again,” says Joseph Aresso, Ph.D., Vice Chairman, Department of Neuroscience, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York.

Promoting Health and Wellness Through Music

Freenotes are beautiful sculptural instruments, which create environments that are useable by all people, including an aging population, people with disabilities, and an increasingly diverse culture. Improving human performance, they ensure musical success from the very first note. This unique play experience connects people through creativity in outdoor environments, creating a sense of joyful community and belonging for both players and listeners. One of the greatest strengths of Freenotes Harmony Park instruments is the way they bridge the gap between individuals of varying abilities, thereby reducing isolation and social stigma. At a Freenotes Harmony Park, there are no insurmountable disabilities, and there are *no wrong notes*.