

Meet the Instruments:

Design a Costume and Create
Your Own Performance!

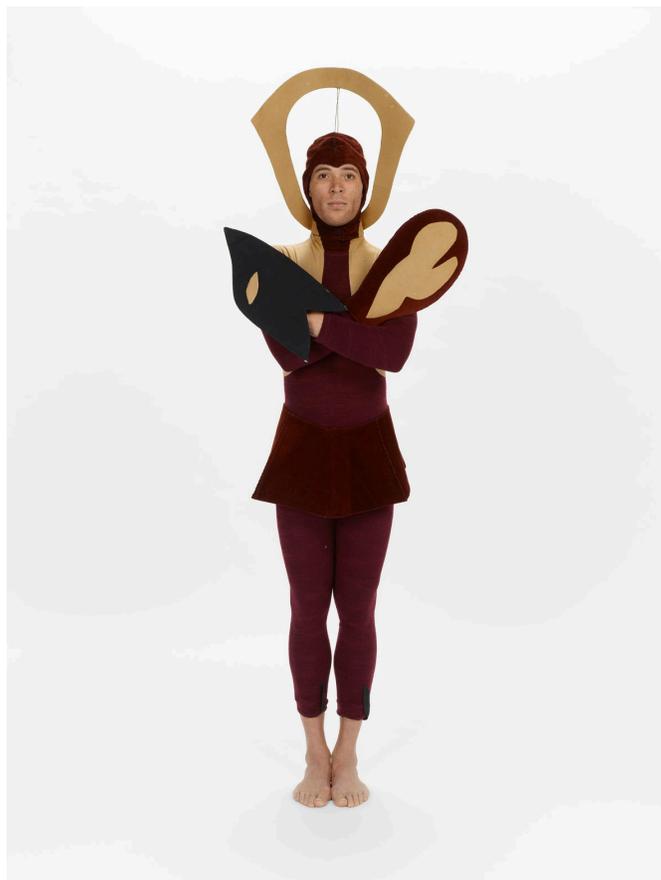
For ages 4 and up

Overview

Every sound is also a movement, since sound waves are created by vibrations! Certain sounds may inspire us to move in particular ways, and specific movements can create distinct sounds. We are going to explore the relationship between sound and movement as we watch and listen to *Serenade for Strings* performed by the Minnesota Orchestra.

While we listen to the orchestra play, we will move our bodies and think about mood, expression, and rhythm to make a performance that complements the music! Then we will design a costume inspired by the string instruments!

It will take 30 minutes to complete this activity.



Merce Cunningham, David Hare, costume for *Mysterious Adventure*, 1945; Walker Art Center, Merce Cunningham Dance Company Collection, Gift of Jay F. Ecklund, the Barnett and Annalee Newman Foundation, Agnes Gund, Russell Cowles and Josine Peters, the Hayes Fund of HRK Foundation, Dorothy Lichtenstein, MAHADH Fund of HRK Foundation, Goodale Family Foundation, Marion Stroud Swingle, David Teiger, Kathleen Fluegel, Barbara G. Pine, and the T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 2011; courtesy Walker Art Center

Materials

- Paper
- Pencil
- Clothing
- Household objects (optional)

Project Set-up

- Find a space where you have enough room to move around freely.

Part 1: Moving to the Music

Start by listening to *Serenade for Strings* and pay attention to what stands out to you. How does the music make you feel? What does it remind you of? How would you describe the mood of this song?

Next, we are going to begin to create our dance. Keep listening and experiment with different ways of moving your body along with the music. You can let yourself be inspired by the music all on its own, or try one of these suggestions:

- If this music represented an animal, what animal would it be? Incorporate the movements of that animal as you dance along to the music. Does the animal's mood change over the course of the piece? How do these mood changes affect your movements?

- Imagine this song is a journey from one place to another. Where does the journey begin? Show your surroundings through your movements. As the piece continues, let the speed, intensity, mood, and rhythm of the music guide how you travel on your journey. Are there places in the music where you encounter obstacles on your journey? Do you find treasure? Do you speed up or slow down, or change your mode of transportation? Do you climb mountains, cross rivers, parachute from mountaintops, or turn back? Let the music guide your movements.

- Instead of moving WITH the music, try moving AGAINST it. Can you move your body in a way that feels like it is the opposite of the mood, speed, intensity, and rhythm? For example, when the music moves quickly, you move slowly; when the intensity increases, you move more gently; if the mood is peaceful, you move energetically; etc. Try moving only in the spaces in between sounds. What are some other ways you can move against the music?

Decide what movements felt best to you. This will be the dance you perform!

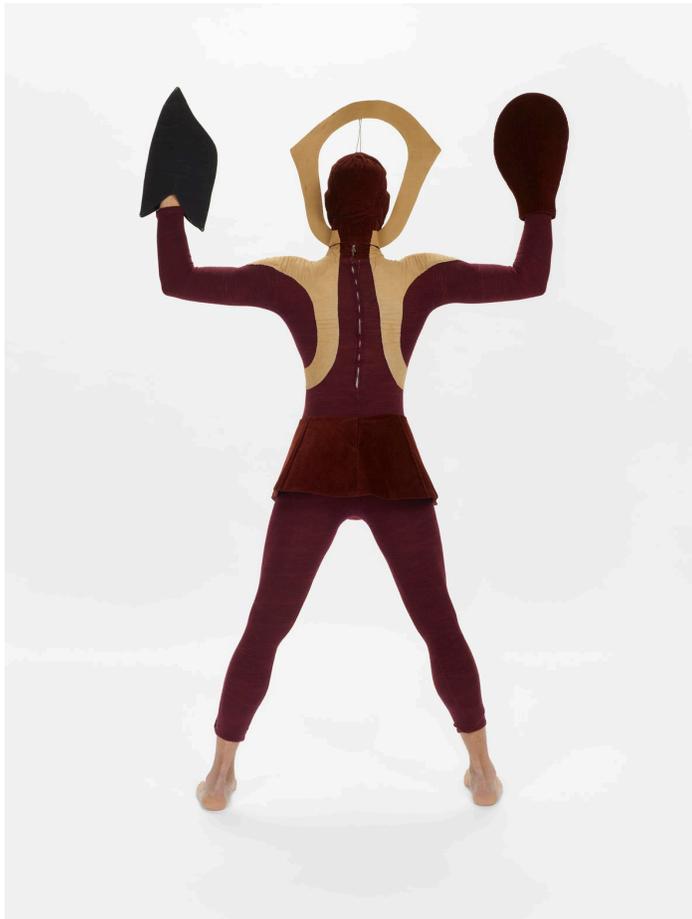
Part 2: Connect with Art at the Walker

Next, we will design a costume to wear during our performance. For inspiration, let's consider how Merce Cunningham, a dancer and choreographer— or person who makes dances— created unique costumes for his performances.

Merce Cunningham often worked with musicians, artists, and costume designers when creating his dances. Let's look at his costume for *Mysterious Adventure*. What does this costume remind you of? How do you think it would feel to wear this costume? What movements do you think dancer wearing the costume made? How might the title *Mysterious Adventure* relate to the costume?

According to Merce Cunningham, "The dance was very quick, and had a lot of hopping about, like a mosquito." Based on the costume and this description of the movements, what guesses can you make about what the music might sound like?

Listen to a [clip](#) of the music for *Mysterious Adventure* by John Cage. Does it sound the way you imagined it? Why or why not?



Part 3: Creating Your Costume

Now it's your turn to make a costume! Listen again to *Serenade for Strings* and remember the movements you created for your dance. How can you relate your costume to the music by choosing specific colors and textures that mimic the mood of the music? Think about how wearing certain things can change the way you move. For example, if you wear oven mitts on your hands, or put both of your legs into one half of a pair of pants, this will influence the kinds of movements you can make! What clothing, objects, and everyday household items can you use to create your costume?

Put on your costume and perform the dance you created in Part 1. You might want to invite an audience to come and watch! After the applause has died down, think about these questions:

- How did your movements reflect the mood of the music?
- How did you decide what materials to use for your costume?
- What did you learn about string instruments as you designed your costume and dance?
- How do you think your movements and costume might look different if you had created them for the wind instruments? For brass? For percussion?

Left: Merce Cunningham, David Hare, costume for *Mysterious Adventure*, 1945; Walker Art Center, Merce Cunningham Dance Company Collection, Gift of Jay F. Ecklund, the Barnett and Annalee Newman Foundation, Agnes Gund, Russell Cowles and Josine Peters, the Hayes Fund of HRK Foundation, Dorothy Lichtenstein, MAHADH Fund of HRK Foundation, Goodale Family Foundation, Marion Stroud Swingle, David Teiger, Kathleen Fluegel, Barbara G. Pine, and the T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 2011; courtesy Walker Art Center