

# Rent instruments from the Free Library of Philadelphia

Fancy learning the banjo?

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Perry Genovesi really loves being a librarian in the music department of the Central Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia. Thanks to him, Philly is building a whole new orchestra of musicians ready to put the city's music scene back in the spotlight.

Since Sept. 26, the Free Library is only one of a handful in the country to make musical instruments available to lend to its patrons. "If we can give sheet music and books about music, why shouldn't we be able to lend out instruments as well?" says Perry.

So he and a fellow librarian approached the library and received grant money to start the Musical Instrument Collection. They purchased six new instruments: electric guitar, electric bass, acoustic-electric guitar, mandolin, banjo and ukulele. "We picked fretted stringed instruments because we wanted people to just pick up the instrument and start playing," Perry says.

Each device comes with a kit that contains an amp, tuner and other essentials you'll need to, ahem, rock out. Of course, the librarians can also arm each aspiring musician with a stack of beginner books to learn the chords.

The reception for these instruments has been overwhelming.

Members have praised the pilot program and also offered to donate their used instruments, which the library is more than happy to accept.

Julie Berger, senior writer and editor for the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation, was among the first to borrow an instrument from MIC. She grew up learning to play the piano until the fourth grade, but has since forgotten how to read music. Undaunted, Berger chose to check out the mandolin along with books, including "Mandolin for Dummies."

During her three-week rental, she practiced for five days during her free time and focused on reading the tablature, which is a



A range of instruments are available including electric guitar, mandolin and ukulele. ALBERT LEE

form of musical notation that puts the attention on finger placement instead of the pitch. "I was excited about tuning it and got a bit overzealous, which caused me to break a string! That's it. My career is over."

Albeit her own foray into the music world was short-lived, Berger thinks it's remarkable that the library offers free access to instru-

ments to anyone in the city. "There's been a big push on what people in the city need or want beyond books, DVDs and CDs. From neckties to baking equipment and now musical instruments, we're figuring out how the library can provide that."

If you want to take advantage of MIC, all you need is a Free Library card and to be a member

in good standing, (fines are OK, but your account can't be blocked), and the instrument is yours to take home for the standard period of three weeks. The included guitar picks, which are made of recycled library cards, are yours to keep. "They make amazing stock," Perry says.

The only question left to ask is, when's the next concert?