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spotlights

The Casa de la Música de Viena en Puebla is housed in a historic building that was once home to Mexico's largest textile factory. Photo courtesy La Constancia Mexicana

THE SOUND OF MÚSICA

In 1938, Viennese composer Ernst Rosenfeld-Römer fled to Mexico to escape the Nazis. He changed his name to Ernesto Roemer and re-established his musical career as an orchestra conductor. Seventy-seven years later, Ernesto's grandson, Mexican diplomat Andrés Roemer, has helped facilitate another journey of music from Austria to Latin America. He and the **Haus der Musik,** an ASTC-member museum in Vienna, Austria, established the Casa de la Música de Viena en Puebla (House of Music of Vienna in Puebla), which opened on January 13.

Based in Puebla, about a two-hour drive from Mexico City, the new museum is within a former textile factory, once the largest of its kind south of the United States. The sole replica of the Haus der Musik outside of Austria, the Puebla museum is modeled on the one in Vienna in terms of architecture, size (53,820 square feet (5,000 square meters)), and content, allowing visitors to engage with a host of interactive features that explore music and sound. They can direct a virtual orchestra and listen to a spectrum of music, from rock to classical, on a state-of-the-art speaker system. Other spaces are dedicated to composers beloved around the world, including Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Franz Schubert.

As Simon K. Posch, managing director of the Haus der Musik in Vienna, emphasizes, both institutions are meant to bring "people closer to music, beyond language barriers and cultural differences." Unique to the Puebla version, however, is a space dedicated to temporary exhibitions that highlight Mexico's own rich musical traditions. Most recently, it focused on the Mexican composer and violinist Juventino Rosas, who was known for his waltzes.

Financed by a Mexican Public-Private Partnerships initiative, the Casa de la Música also aims to better local youth's futures through music education. Backers include the state of Puebla, the Mexican federal government and its National Council for Culture and Arts (Conaculta), and Fundación Azteca, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting social responsibility. The total cost of the new museum was 160 million pesos (USD 10.2 million). —*Joelle Seligson*

Details: Helmut Lenhardt, Leitung Marketing & PR, Haus der Musik, Vienna, Austria, helmut.lenhardt@hdm.at, *www.hausdermusik.at/en*

DEFYING EXPECTATIONS

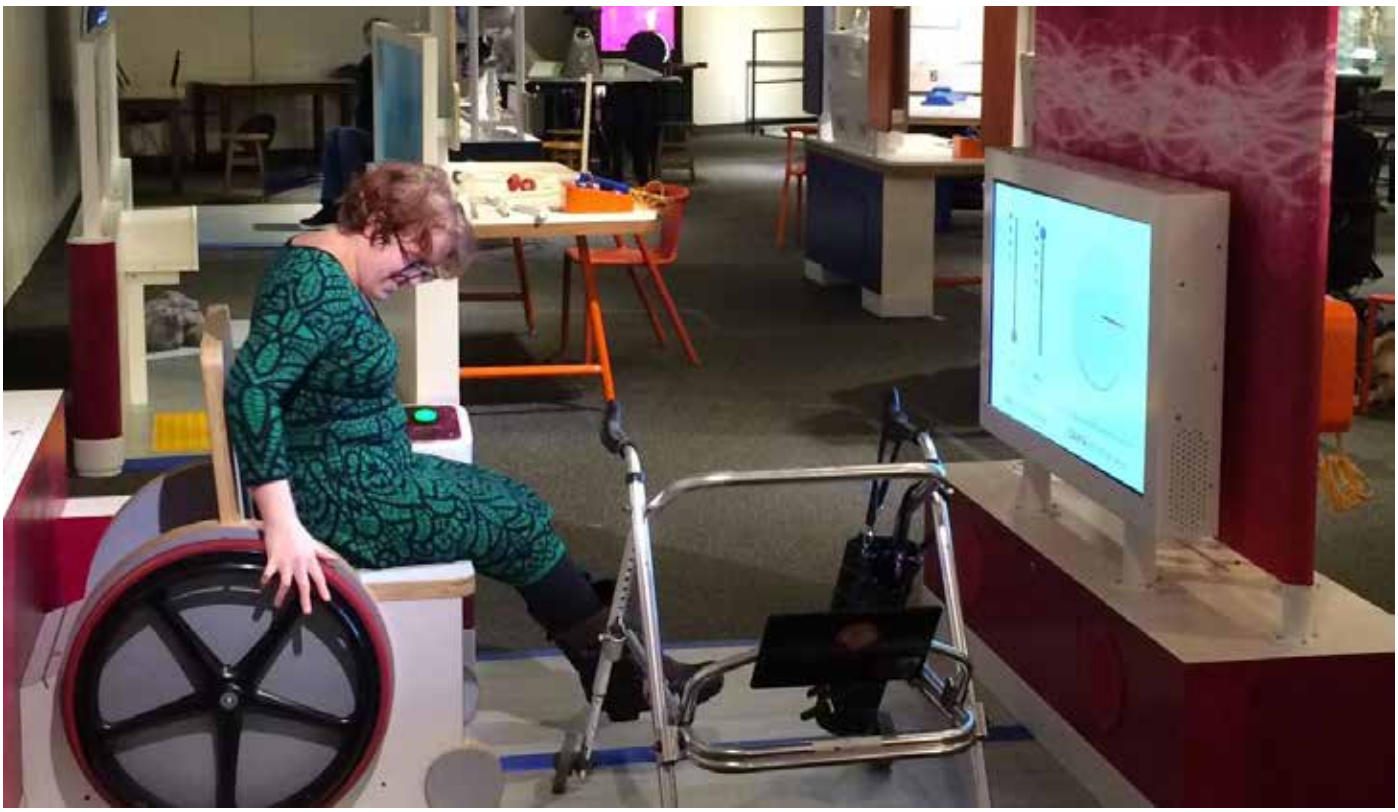
Who says that we have to be able to hear to experience music—or that wheelchairs aren't designed for off-roading adventures? The quest to adapt to and overcome disabilities has led to life-altering innovations, accomplishing with technology what our bodies cannot do on their own.

Human Plus: Real Lives + Real Engineering is "organized around the stories of people with disabilities," explains Eric Siegel, former director and chief content officer at the **New York Hall of Science,** Queens, which created the traveling exhibition along with the **Oregon Museum of Science and Industry,** Portland, and the Quality of Life Technology Center at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh, with funding from the National Science Foundation. The exhibition is personal to Siegel: his daughter Lilith, who has cerebral palsy, was among a group of residents that contributed to its content.

In its 13 exhibits, *Human Plus* introduces visitors to engineers and people coping with disabilities who have helped develop inspiring tools, such as a power wheelchair equipped with robotic arms (and another specially designed for veering off the beaten path) and a vest that lets the wearer physically feel music. In addition, Every Body Plays features a mono-ski, or a single ski outfitted with a seat, which visitors can ride down a simulated slalom course, and More Than a Mouse highlights technologies that allow users to move a cursor across a computer screen with their feet, eyes, or noses. Within the exhibition's 2,000 square feet (186 square meters), visitors can test out these devices and even try to create their own. They can also discover stories of real-life individuals—such as Erik Weihenmayer, the first blind climber to reach the top of Mt. Everest—who haven't let their disabilities stop them from achieving greatness.

The $2 million exhibition will be traveling through at least December 2017, with stops throughout the United States. —*J.S.*

Details: Eric Siegel, former director and chief content officer, New York Hall of Science, esiegel@nyscience.org, *programs.omsi.edu/professionals/traveling-exhibits/human-plus-real-lives-real-engineering*



Lilith Siegel, one of the residents that contributed to the content of *Human Plus: Real Lives + Real Engineering*, explores the exhibition. Photo courtesy the New York Hall of Science

Above: Visitors walk along a fog bridge on Mid-America Science Museum's skywalk. Right: The Arkansas Underfoot Gallery features a Giant Tree and Mastodon cast, as well as a crawl-through cave. Photos by Dero Sanford

A NEW LOOK AT ARKANSAS

The revamped **Mid-America Science Museum** gives visitors a chance to explore Arkansas from the tops of its trees to deep underground, and from prehistoric life to visions of the future. Based in Hot Springs, the museum became the first Smithsonian affiliate in Arkansas when it opened in 1979—and it hadn't been updated since. With a $7.8 million capital grant from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, the institution renovated its building and exhibits.

The refreshed museum, which opened on March 7, features a skywalk that allows visitors to venture 200 yards (183 meters) into the forest canopy, as well as Underground Arkansas, in which visitors can crawl through a true-to-life cave to learn about the state's geology. In total, the museum features some 65,000 square feet (5,110 square meters) of space, filled with more than 100 exhibits.

Museum staff collaborated with colleagues across the country to develop the new displays. The Exploratorium's Global Studios Team created most of the new exhibits, and Pacific Studios designed and installed a map wall and woodwork including a Giant Tree and the platform that holds a Mastodon cast replica. There are still some markers of the past, however. A dozen of the museum's classic exhibits, such as Rowland Emett's kinetic sculptures, the world's most powerful Tesla coil, and the Mastodon itself, have been retained.

Jim Miller, director of marketing, reports that the updates have intrigued visitors new and old, near and far. "We have had comments from individuals outside of the state who feel that the museum is now perhaps one of the best in the country," he says. —*J.S.*

Details: Jim Miller, director of marketing, Mid-America Science Museum, jimm@midamericamuseum.org, *www.midamericamuseum.org*

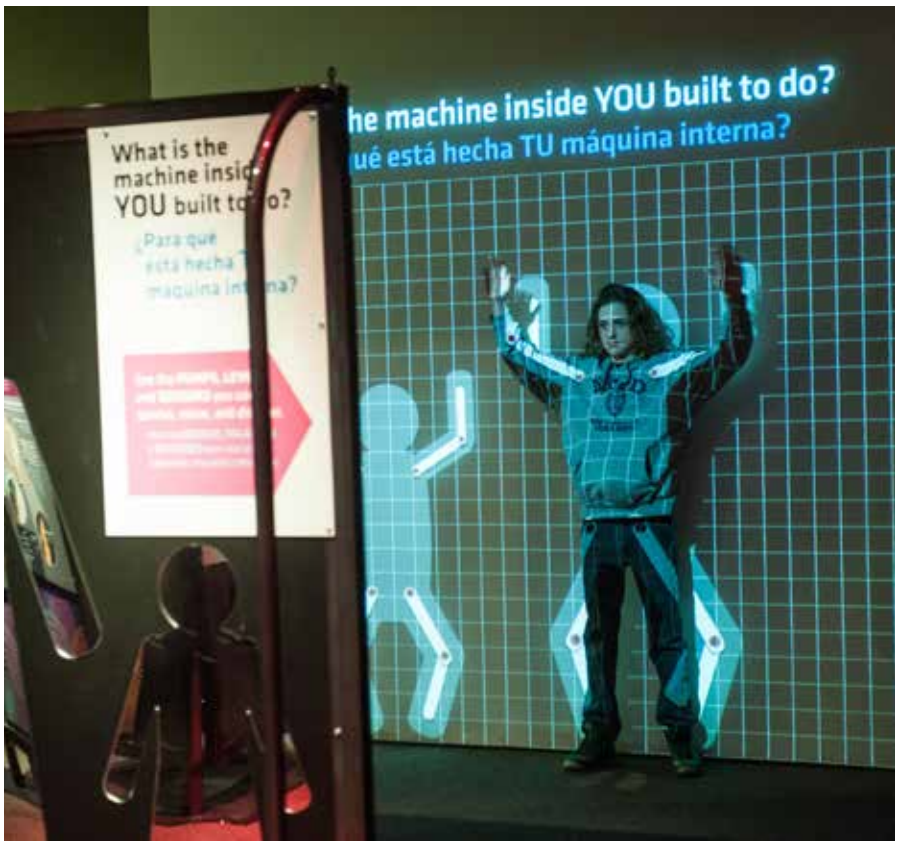
NATURE'S INNOVATIONS

The Flight Interactive is the **Field Museum's** traveling exhibitions manager Lindsay Washburn's favorite experience in *The Machine Inside: Biomechanics*. "Sitting in a chair that can freely rotate, visitors propel themselves by flapping models of different types of wings," she explains. Along with having a blast trying their hands (and arms) at "flying," participants can learn the advantages and disadvantages of each wing shape. It's one of a host of interactives that *Biomechanics* uses to take visitors "past the familiar surface of nature, and deep inside its incredible workings," Washburn adds.

Developed by the Field Museum, Chicago, in partnership with the **Denver Museum of Nature and Science** and with support provided by the Searle Funds at the Chicago Community Trust and ITW Foundation, the traveling exhibition reveals how animals adapt to their environment—and how we as humans have drawn on these natural marvels to devise our own tools. Velcro, for example, was inspired by clingy woodland burrs, while the UltraCane, a walking tool that uses echolocation to guide people who are blind, is modeled on the way bats navigate in the dark. Visitors can try an animal's biomechanics on for size, testing how their grip strength measures up to a chimp's and squeezing a model giraffe's heart to pump blood up its 7-foot-long (2-meter-long) neck. The exhibition also features robots designed to mimic the way warm- and cold-blooded creatures get around. These robots capture data and help scientists gain a greater understanding of Earth's most innovative natural designs.

In its entirety, the exhibition examines the full spectrum of natural engineering, from Jaws and Claws to Legs and Springs and everything in between. Between its two versions, at 5,000 and 7,500 square feet (465 and 697 square meters), *Biomechanics* has already traveled as far as Jerusalem and will circle North America through at least 2020. —*J.S.*

Details: Lindsay Washburn, traveling exhibitions manager, lwashburn@fieldmuseum.org, *biomechanics.fieldmuseum.org*



Above: *The Machine Inside: Biomechanics* explores how plants and animals have evolved to contend with external forces. Photo by Karen Bean, the Field Museum

Left: Levers are projected onto a visitor's body to show how the biomechanics of our bodies allow us to survive, move, and discover. Photo by Jean Lachat, the Field Museum