

EXPLORE WITH THE COLUMBUS MUSEUM

Seeing Sound with Gene Davis



Gene Davis, *Night Rider*, 1981, 69" x 98.25", Collection of The Columbus Museum

For over 25 years, artist Gene Davis experimented with a single, linear element – stripes! By varying the width, hue, and placement of these stripes he created hundreds of original permutations like the large-scale painting seen here. *Night Rider* was completed in 1981 and is now in the permanent collection of The Columbus Museum.

The artist once commented that the negative spaces and colors found in his compositions directly relate to the “intervals and rhythms in music.” Did you know that intervals are found not only in music, but also in art and math? Specifically, Davis was inspired by the improvisational character of jazz; and his compositions, while calculated in appearance, are actually quite spontaneous – a process he referred to as “playing by eye.”

Jazz is a genre of music that prizes improvisation, creative freedom, and collaboration. Players often make up solos on the spot. This “call” is then answered by a spontaneous musical “response” from other musicians in the ensemble. Jazz developed in the early 20th Century in African-American communities in New Orleans, New York, Chicago, and Kansas City, MO. To listen to jazz legend Miles Davis, click [here!](#)

Look closely at *Night Rider*. Try selecting a specific color and following it; “take time,” as Davis suggests, “to see how it operates across the painting.” Once you have familiarized yourself with the composition, it’s your turn! Create a soundtrack or original piece of music inspired by Gene Davis’s *Night Rider*.



EXPLORE WITH THE COLUMBUS MUSEUM

Seeing Sound with Gene Davis

(Continued)

If you are responding to the work with an original piece of music, don't forget to record your process for composing as a response to the visual piece. Some guiding questions:

- Why did you choose the tempo or overall feel of your composition?
- Does this work of art remind you of something personal?
- How was this challenging to you as a composer? Have you ever used a sense, other than hearing, to compose a piece of music?

If you are creating a playlist on Spotify for this artwork, mention the following:

- What qualities did you look for in songs when curating your playlist?
- Was there an overall feeling you wanted to highlight? If so, why?
- For 3-5 songs on your playlist, dig into more specific connections as to why you feel this works as a soundtrack to *Night Rider*.
- How was this challenging to you? Will you try it again?

Once you complete whichever process you choose, take a video of yourself performing the piece, or talking a bit about your curated playlist. Use the space below to get started!

*This activity was created by artist, musician, and educator Amber Thieneman! Follow her on Instagram @grittypearl

