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Child-Friendly at the Manchester International Festival

By Anthony Tommasini

MANCHESTER, England — Many arts festivals try hard to be engaging for young people. Over the weekend the Manchester International Festival went all out.

A free two-day event called “The Great Indoors” took over most the old Manchester Town Hall, an architecturally magnificent structure built mostly during the 1870s, a Gothic-looking place with three grand spiral staircases, marble and granite stonework, mosaics everywhere and an impressive 280-foot clock tower.

A host of international performers and arts groups invited children into specially set-up rooms to create things, make music and cut loose...

...In a conference room, the Swiss artist Martin Müller set up his kinetic sculptures for an interactive exhibit called “Maschinenkunst.” One device was a wiry tower with an enormous pair of metal hands that clapped in response to the hand-claps of kids. Another was an elaborate contraption that produced scratchy sounds from a real violin when the children pumped pedals...