

Observations from *Hit Match - Game Scores*

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I came to *Hit Match* expecting to watch a musical performance and left feeling as though I had watched an athletic match - with all of its attendant euphoric boisterousness!

Upon entry into the black box performance space, there were two long tables with a variety of similar objects laid out on each, with a shorter table at one end, loosely forming a *U* with the open end towards the audience.

The 2 percussionists, Jessica Tsang and Noam Bierstone, were having technical checks done on their bodysuits. At that point the percussionists' body language and interactions read like that of musicians preparing and settling in for a performance: the way in which they held their drumsticks, upright posture, methodical approach to their instruments, and the muted tone of their voices as they conferred. The audience also behaved as though arriving for a performance: talking quietly to each other while occasionally observing what was happening "on stage".

The performance was introduced by the researchers, with one researcher settling in at the small table in an announcer role. The bodysuits that the musicians wore had lights which would be either turned off or on depending on the sequence in which the musicians played the objects before them.

A scoreboard was presented, with the words "Game, Set, Match" boldly presented in the centre. There was a clarity to it: the one who wins the game that wins the set that wins the match is the ultimate winner.

Each set had rules pertaining to the desired off-on sequences of the lights on the suits, and how the musicians would be scored, with the score posted to the audience in real-time. The announcer triggered the lights on the bodysuit of the victor so that they would flash rhythmically, and the scoreboard flashed highlighting the winner's scores.

This format provided multiple opportunities for both musician-players to be declared winners, allowing the audience multiple opportunities to cheer their chosen musician-player on.

The announcer explained the rules to the audience and stated that there would be a test-run to ensure that the technology was working smoothly. The musicians' approach to the first game continued to be somewhat methodical, with a certain rhythmicity. During the first set, when the percussive objects were moved out of place, or in the case of ceramic tiles, accidentally broken and then replaced, it was done with a certain care. Both musicians were equally applauded at the conclusion of the first set, and the audience seemed enthusiastically appreciative without yet fully embracing the fan mindset.

This, however, soon shifted. Unlike a typical musical performance, the performers were asked to switch tables at the beginning of the second set, explicitly to ensure that the technology attached to a certain table did not confer an advantage – to level the playing field, as it were. A certain excitement had started to build, both with the players and the audience. Noam had won the first two sets, but when Jess and Noam switched sides, and then Jess won, the audience actively cheered her on.

Musicality of any sort had been discarded, and the two musicians were now firmly in player mode. Their body language communicated their competitiveness, rather than the collegial postures with which they

first engaged. The players had begun to strike the objects aggressively, not moderating their strikes – objects began to flip off the tables when they were struck.

The body language of the audience had changed as well, with most of the audience leaning forward in their chairs – fandom had begun. Cheering and groans could be heard from the audience in response to the performance of the player they were cheering on.

By the end of the match, the conversion from performance to sporting event was complete. The players need not have been musicians: they were completely in it for the win, and each had dedicated fans who either congratulated or commiserated with them as they left. The audience had appropriated the language of sports, focussing on the outcome: “That was close!”; “You nearly had him!”; “Way to go!”

In this case, it seems that the musicians and audience were able to successfully transform into players and fans, with no need to resort to the suspension of disbelief.