

communication is hard

a game

for 2 musicians
(probably percussionists)

for humans everywhere

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Instrument List:

Each player should have a trap table featuring four or five objects. These setups should be as near to identical as can easily be managed. Players should face one another, and their setups should be mirrored.

ex: a small drum, a shaker, a wood block, a wine bottle, and a plastic bag

These will be struck with beaters.

Players will set up facing each other. Between the two players, on a music stand or similar surface both can reach, a door stop (or similar thwubbbb) and a hospitality bell (or something else that goes "ding") should be firmly affixed.

Door stop and bell may be installed on a 2x4 or similar for ease of play. This will likely need to be clamped to the shared surface.

Duration: ~5'



View of one possible setup
(Kevin Yetter and Cherri Chen,
Small World Coffee, 7/15/22)



close-up of ding + thwub



View of setup at premier
(Kevin Yetter and Cherri Chen,
Princeton Record Exchange, 7/15/22)

This is a game about communication.

The piece begins with an introduction, written out in traditional notation. The intro should last about 25 seconds, after which point the game begins. The game progresses until it falls apart, at which point the players regroup and play the Conclusion.

Throughout the game, one or both players tap a pulse on an object. (In the premier, this was a shaker, tapped with a beater.)

Players take turns "Listening," holding the pulse while the other player "Speaks" (performs an improvised figure) over pulse.

Once this figure is performed, the "Speaker" resumes pulse, while the "Listener" considers what they have heard and performs a new figure, based on the figure "Speaker" has just performed. This response should have the following characteristics:

- 1) it should express something expressed in the original (for example, notes getting successively louder)
- 2) it should do this in a way that notably differs from the original (for example, more notes on different instruments, but still getting successively louder).

In this way, the "Listener" makes clear that they have understood and recreated the salient feature (as determined by Speaker).

Once the "Listener" has finished performing their response, it is up to the "Speaker" to decide whether or not their intention has been understood.

If so, "Speaker" taps the bell, "*ding!*" — good job "Listener"! — and then both players tap the pulse.

If not, "Speaker" strikes the doorstop, "*thwub-b-b-b!*", and performs a new phrase that executes the same goal as before; the "Listener" then attempts again to understand the intended goal, again performing something to that effect.

This *thwub - repeat* can happen more than once in a given round until a *ding* is earned and achieved.

At this point, "Listener" becomes the new "Speaker," and the process is repeated, with fresh phrases and goals.

When each player has both Listened and Spoken once each, Round 1 is complete, and both players play a brief, pre-composed snippet in unison. This leads directly into Round 2, starting with a shared pulse before the first Speaker drops out of the pulse in preparation for their improvised phrase.

Each successive round should be slightly faster than the prior round. Thus, after each "round complete" theme, when the new pulse begins, it should begin a little faster, with a bar or two of shared pulse to establish an agreement on the new tempo.