

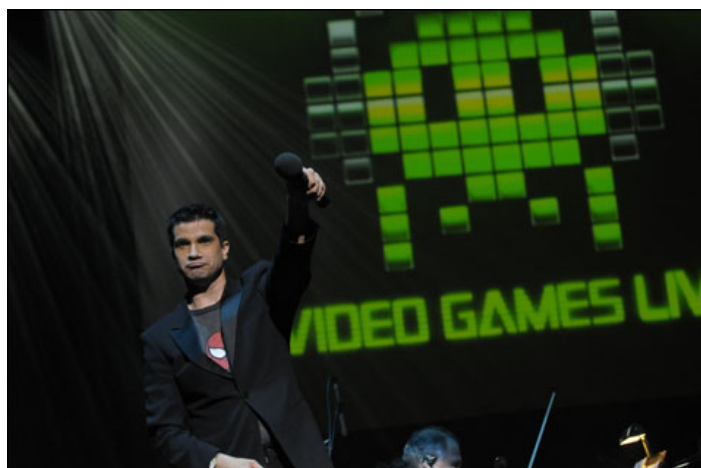


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# Do video games promote violins?

Video Games Live at the Wang Theatre, November 21, 2008

By **DAVE BARKER** | November 25, 2008 Like 0



**BLEEP!** The music actually worked better without the distraction of the overhead games footage.

The lights go down, the audience hushes, and the orchestra plays the first notes of the evening: "Beep. Boop. Beep." The crowd erupts at this real-world rendering, which is perfectly timed to match the 30-foot tall game of *Pong* projected over the performers' heads.

So begins Video Games Live, a performance of themes from *Final Fantasy*, *Super Mario Bros.*, *Halo*, *The Legend of Zelda*, and more — a showcase that gives eight-bit classics the lush instrumental soundtracks they never had, and modern game music the attention it deserves. VGL host and founder Tommy Tallarico, the Springfield-born game-music composer, presides with a curious fanboy bravado, simultaneously playful and earnest. Since he started VGL, in 2005, there've been more than 90 shows worldwide, but this is the first stop in Boston.

VGL shows that video-game music can stand alone. The musicians (about 30, including strings, plus occasional vocal chorus) don't just reproduce the familiar soundtracks, they capture the feel of the games. Their *Metroid* tribute conjures the isolation and tension of a hostile alien world; the *God of War* theme packs powerful, ancient-sounding rhythms; the *Sonic the Hedgehog* medley is breezy and fun. Although

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critics praised *BioShock*'s sparse yet poignant soundtrack, the live reworking (introduced by the game's creator, 2K Boston's Ken Levine) doesn't muster the structure of a complete, integral composition. Still, the music never fails to evoke.

Game footage accompanies each piece, displayed on that enormous screen — a nice touch, if distracting. Other crowd-pleasing flourishes abound: during the *Metal Gear Solid* theme, Snake sneaks around on stage in his trademark cardboard box; pianist Martin **Leung** does the blindfolded performance of the *Mario* theme that made him a YouTube celebrity; and an eight-year-old audience member plays the first home video game against Ralph Baer, its 86-year-old creator (who *totally* cheats but then lets the kid win). Gaming may be a mostly private pastime, but Video Games Live offers another public glimpse of the broad common culture lying just beneath the pixelated surface.

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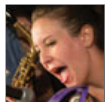


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