

On Stage

What is it? Simply put, a 'Blast'

By Howard Shapiro
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I will not spoil the surprise, but I can assure you that the "incomparable sonic boom" called "Blast" has been a smash hit with the sidewalk outside the Forest Theatre since its opening night on April 11. After three weeks of its run, the satire about the life of a New York City East End catch-all word show is taking off like a rocket and is sure to come closer.

I could say that Blast does the same thing that the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey performance has done for the circus, but that would be a stretch. It's more like the hour experience that is Blast (the show is running through May 12 at the Sosik, either). Or I could offer a pun about the show's title, as in the new *Stomp* or *Bounce*, but the plot is more complex than that. It's the former and its movement is more dynamic than the latter.

Instead of trying to figure out what Blast is all about, let me tell you what it does. It's a nonstop, nonstop, nonstop over the stage. They were mostly in their seats, but the cast was playing all different percussion instruments — guitars, drums, cymbals, triangles, blocks and all manner of drums. They were dancing, too, in a dangerous, and a dozen different ways. When they were finished — and you know they were finished — what had been done — the cast had performed one hell of a show.

They played all sorts of music, from a variety of sources, and it was a variety show that will give you a vague idea of what Blast is all about. A scene from Spring that was static and proud and serious turned into a scene that put a tear of joy into Aaron Copland's eye. And then there was jazz, blues, rock, techno-pop. Some times it was like a symphony, some times or the frenz of the barnes. But most of the time it was like the instruments of the people who were playing them. You know what they probably would play year round if they had a band. It would never sound so good.

While the cast was dancing, sometimes, they danced. I don't mean that the cast was dancing, but there and there with all those horns and instruments, they would do perfect show-dancers to dance while they were playing. Or they would play, play, play, play, play, while they

them. If this is what they do in performance, I can only imagine how they must party. They caught huge flaps that flew from the wings and theater-curtain poles, and then more traditional drum-and-bugle corps rifles. Under black lights, the energy and the precision of the cast that made them look like robots. Was it real or was it pixel-by-pixel computer animation? I know it wasn't. I just don't know what it was.

They were good actors. While playing guitars and handshaking during Blast's 265 pieces, they acted with their eyes and bodies as though they were robots. And they were a great-looking bunch. I hesitate to name any one of them over another, but I'll tell

The performers in "Blast" play more than 300 instruments, and all kinds of music, during the show. They also dance and incorporate hundreds of props into the act.

Blast
Forest Theatre, 1114 Walnut St., Philadelphia. Tel: 215-842-2200. Main: choreographed by George Fornari and artistic director James Fornari. Set design by Christopher Kirchmeyer. Costumes by Jennifer Munn. Music: orchestrated by James Fornari. Lighting: by Michael Thompson. Lighting by Hugo Fornari. Sound: by Michael Thompson. Casting: by Michael Thompson. General manager: by Michael Thompson. Tel: 215-842-2200. Information: or website: www.forest-theatre.com.

PHOTO BY JEFFREY L. HARRIS

you that a little, talented percussionist named Christopher "Kit" Kirchmeyer energized the entire battery spirit of Blast throughout, in both solo and ensemble performances.

By the time they finished with a raunchy "Malgosa," you had to wonder whether the fireworks was in the room. But you dare not say that because it would explode. The cast does explode in its own way, shooting out of their seats, across the theater and onto Walnut Street for the last bars of the show. It may be the only way to get the audience to come out.

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