

On Stage

What is it? Simply put, a 'Blast'

By Howard Shapiro
 I will not even try to categorize the inimitable music known as Blast, now cracking the windows outside the Forest Theater and maybe, over the next three weeks of its run, the entire neighborhood of Center City East. The catch-all word "blast" is tailor-made for it. Nothing else comes close.

I could say that Blast does the same thing for downtown Philadelphia as the 1960s did for New York. It doesn't really capture it, but it does come close to the experience that is Blast. It doesn't really capture it, but it does come close to the experience that is Blast. It doesn't really capture it, but it does come close to the experience that is Blast.

They played all sorts of music: a lively blues that got things rolling and gave you a vague idea of what was to come. The Cat in the Hat... Spring that was stark and proud and... put a row of big into Aaron Copland's eye. They played jazz, blues, rock, techno-pop. Sometimes they played the floor of the stage of the Forest. Or they held their instruments. Or they... If you get too close, they probably would play your nose. Believe me, you would never want to read.

Must not play like these months, they danced. I don't mean that they moved gracefully here and there with all those horns and drums. They played. We expect show-stoppers to dance while they sing. We don't expect them to play like this, while they...

them. If this is what they do in performance, I can only imagine how they must party. They caught huge flags that flew from the wings and theatrical props that substituted for more traditional drum-and-hugle-corpse rifles. Under black lights, the choreography of the props and the precision of the cast that moved them was astounding. Was it real or was it great-by-pk of computer animation? I know it was real. I just can't prove it. They were good actors. While playing and dancing and manswearing Blast's 200 props, they acted with their eyes and bodies as though they had scripts. And they were a great-looking bunch. I hesitate to name any one of them over another, but I'll tell you that a like, talented percussionist named Christopher "Kit" Chatham embodies the Energizer battery spirit of Blast throughout, in both solo and ensemble performance. By the time they finished with a steamy "Malaguna," you had to wonder what the temperature was in the room. But you dare not take in a thermometer; it would explode. The cast does explode in its own way, shooting through the aisles of 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. Contact Howard Shapiro at 215-954-9727 or hshapiro@phillynews.com.

The performers in "Blast" play more than 200 instruments, and all kinds of music, during the show. They also dance and incorporate hundreds of props into the act. Blast... them. If this is what they do in performance, I can only imagine how they must party. They caught huge flags that flew from the wings and theatrical props that substituted for more traditional drum-and-hugle-corpse rifles. Under black lights, the choreography of the props and the precision of the cast that moved them was astounding. Was it real or was it great-by-pk of computer animation? I know it was real. I just can't prove it. They were good actors. While playing and dancing and manswearing Blast's 200 props, they acted with their eyes and bodies as though they had scripts. And they were a great-looking bunch. I hesitate to name any one of them over another, but I'll tell you that a like, talented percussionist named Christopher "Kit" Chatham embodies the Energizer battery spirit of Blast throughout, in both solo and ensemble performance. By the time they finished with a steamy "Malaguna," you had to wonder what the temperature was in the room. But you dare not take in a thermometer; it would explode. The cast does explode in its own way, shooting through the aisles of 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. Contact Howard Shapiro at 215-954-9727 or hshapiro@phillynews.com.