

SAN FRANCISCO

by Richard Connema



Blast is a Blast

Also see Richard's recent review of [*Let's Talk About Me*](#)

The American Musical Theatre of San Jose is presenting as its season opener the extravagant Tony Award recipient (for "Best Special Theatrical Event" of 2001), *Blast*. This should not be considered a Broadway musical but an event such as *Riverdance* or *Stomp*. On opening night, I did not know what to expect since I had a certain amount of anxiety about seeing a bunch of young college men and women performing two hours of music on brass and percussion. However, from the first number, a fantastic arrangement of "Bolero," to the final, Malagueña," I was blown away. Every number is a crowd pleasure. There is nonstop excitement in the two hour period. Take a pinch of *Riverdance*, a bit of *Stomp*, a dash of Kodo drummers and a US marching band and you get the quintessence of *Blast*.

In this production, fifty-four eager twenty-somethings carry on like crazy up on the stage; there are acrobatic dancers and great soloists on trumpet, trombone, tuba, flugelhorn, snare drums and marimba to keep the excitement going. The energy level is simply amazing. The group draws its musical inspiration from the classics, blues, jazz, rock and roll and even Broadway.

Blast starts out with one drummer standing center stage as you hear the beat of Revel's "Bolero." He is soon joined by a stageful of musicians who match expert playing of the piece with amazing movements. The Revel piece ends with a thunderous crescendo from the entire marching band. This is a breathtaking opening. Another great performance is that of Frank Sullivan who plays featured trumpet in the "Everybody Loves the Blues" sequence. Nicholas E. Angelis and Christopher "Kit" Chatham are astounding on the snare drums in the Battle of the Drums. Copland's "Appalachian Spring" is beautifully arranged with the dancers flying multicolored flags.

The second act has the hilarious "Gee, Officer Krupke!" from *West Side Story*. Almost every instrument is played by various members of the orchestra, including some "oom pah pahs" from a tuba, a zippy xylophone, and there is even a tiny accordion. Some of the scenes, such as "Color Wheel," are lovely and give the audience a brief respite from the more spectacular pieces. "Lemontech" is a lively techno-pop piece, and the show ends with the whole company playing and dancing to "Malagueña." Following the thunderous applause, the group leaves the stage to go out into the lobby to great the folks.

The choreography is by Jim Moore, George Pinney and Jonathan Vanderkolff, and most of the dancing is done in simple geometric patterns with some basic ballet steps and postures. The set design is also interesting, especially when the back curtain raises and you see a checkerboard on the order of *Hollywood Squares*. This back set reveals five cabinets of percussion players working on drums, gongs, chimes, bells and some members of the xylophone family.

Blast keeps evolving, twisting and flashing to the end. There is never a dull moment. It's a shame that Professor Harold Hill never saw the likes of this band. He would be mighty proud of these boys and girls.

Blast runs through September 22 at the San Jose Center for the Performing Arts, 255 Almaden Blvd, San Jose. For tickets call 888-455-7469 or visit www.amtsj.org.

Cheers - and be sure to check the [lineup of great shows this season in the San Francisco area](#)

Richard Connema