



Toronto's weekly

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BLAST! ★★★

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Featuring the Star of Indiana players. Directed by Jim Mason. To Jun 30. Tue-Sat 8pm; Wed, Sat-Sun 2pm. \$45-\$75. Hummingbird Centre, 1 Front E. 416-872-2262.

Part *Riverdance*, part *Stomp*, and all marching band, *Blast!*, currently onstage at the Hummingbird Centre, seems like it would be a ridiculous idea. Dozens of percussionists, brass



Frenetic musicianship in Blast!

players and baton-twirling dancers perform marching band standards like Ravel's *Bolero*, as well as lesser-known selections, all the while moving about the stage in a strange but impressive combination of athleticism and musicianship.

Jim Mason, producer, director and creator of *Blast!*, is the founder of the Star of Indiana, a world champion drum-and-bugle band. Allegedly inspired by both *Riverdance*, and the Toronto-based Canadian Brass, Mason took his Star of Indiana players to the stage in a desire to focus the energy of an outdoor drum-and-bugle band.

While the music is spectacular, the staging for *Blast!* is generally bland, with rare moments of true theatrical imagination. In what is perhaps a desire to allude to the baton twirlers of the marching band halftime show, the staging relies too heavily on dancers with giant flowing flags and large, geometrically abstract but still twirlable props. Combine this with a monochromatic approach to the design, in which each number tends to take a single colour as its look, and what results is an experience akin to watching the Olympic opening ceremonies without the violins. It is pretty to look at but also cold and distant.

When the Olympic-style staging is abandoned in favour of just letting the musicians play, *Blast!* is at its best. The most exciting and creatively staged moments come when the entire cast is onstage, marching in complicated formations while playing beautifully. The talent is far and away the highlight of the evening, most notably the frenetically charismatic drum soloists Nicolas E. Angelis and **Christopher Chatham**, who score with a phenomenal series of dueling drum solos.

Blast! is ridiculous, but in many ways it works, thanks in large part to the young and talented musicians. Unfortunately, the woefully poor acoustics of the Hummingbird Centre make watching this Tony Award-winner feel less like Broadway and more like a halftime show at SkyDome. Though not entirely a blast, it is still a pretty good night at the theatre. **GRAHAME RENYK**

http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue_06.13.02/arts/onstage.html