

The steady beat of 'Blast!'

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STAGE REVIEW

If halftime shows lasted two hours and there were no accompanying football games, you would have a fair approximation of "Blast!" the marching band production now playing in Wallingford.

With complicated choreography and rich, brassy musical arrangements, suddenly the band is the center of attention. Instead of ducking out to the snack bar or the bathroom before the second half kickoff, the audience was riveted throughout the opening performance Tuesday night at the carver/builder.com Oakdale Theatre.

The concept of the show is based on *Rise of Indiana*, a drum corps with a brass band and color guard. The 54 member cast pretty much is the band. There's no story line, and the performance is essentially a musical revue, offering a smattering of jazz and blues, along with classical and contemporary pieces.

"Blast!" opens with a solitary drummer spotlighted on stage. As he plays the rhythmic tattoo that opens *March of the Soldiers*, his joined onstage by horn players who swirl and sway with the music. More musicians appear as the song builds in intensity, until the stage is packed with brass and percussion.

The next part of the show, "Color Wheel," is more of a performance set piece. A color guard of acrobats in different color flags while repeating aloud the names of the colors. Behind them, percussionists occupy six "rooms" of a two-level stage set loaded with drums, gongs, xylophones and other instruments.

The horn section shows off on "Split Complimentarism" and "Everybody Loves the Blues," and a trumpet player standing on a chair is lowered from the ceiling on "Loss."

But the most impressive part of Act I, if not the whole show, is "Factory Battle."

A snare drummer appears alone onstage and, with mind-boggling speed, beats that drum like a reined mule. His hands blur as he plays under his leg, behind his back and even balances a drumstick on his tongue.

When he finishes, a second drummer plays first with one stick, then two, then three. The drummers face off in a duel,

that's visible are 12 pairs of luminous drumsticks sweeping up and down in a flurry.

The second act includes "Color Wheel Too," with more flags and recitation of color names, and "Lemonchick," a techno dance number featuring cast members in yellow shirts on a stage lit in yellow.

"Targetman's Edge" features a few nontraditional band instruments, like the didgeridoo. The long staff-like instrument produces a humming noise when played, and didgeridoo players spread out into the audience to create a steady buzzing, before giving way to the Colypso-tinged "Land of Make Believe."

circling around each other in mock battle while keeping a steady beat.

Finally, they are joined by more drummers, until there are 12. The lights go down, and all

that's visible are 12 pairs of luminous drumsticks sweeping up and down in a flurry.

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