

A Breathless 'Blast!' of Pure Exhilaration

Theater Review
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U ntil science comes up with something better, nautical-ops may be satisfied with "Blas!" to keep them awake. Few are a little qualified as truth in advertising, the member of this troop toward-winning investigation of a nocturnal ragtime show, with dazzling impact.

Directed by artistic director James Mason out of Birmingham would champion that of Indiana competitive drum corps, "Blas!" which began its limited Los Angeles premiere engagement at UCLA's Bryce Hall on Wednesday.

Like those similarly unconfidentable contrasts, "Blas!" operates as a concert in pure kinetic, exuberant narrative and meaning in fever of form and direction. Movement, music and design are amalgamated for the sake of doing so, with musical response the objective.

However, the parameters of "Blas!" are determined by the traditions of Irish clog dancing, the boundaries of "Stomp" by combining industrial materials and post-Newtonian kinetic street moves. Internal variations notwithstanding, both shows ex-

actly examine single disciplines in exuberant extremes that "Blas!" although basically a celebration of the drill team's art, is a multi-dimensional display of ensemble virtuosity approaching the superhuman.

Throughout a breathless two hours, all 34 touring company members prove world-class instrumentalists, dancers, gymnasts, jugglers and/or clowns, at once.

In the opening tangle of a single drum entering Mark Thompson's effective grid-patterned set-

ting is deceptively simple. Then a white-clad figure appears, proceeding to trace the unmistakable rhythmic underpinnings of Beethoven's "Fidelio" with head confidence.

Others join in, simultaneously playing pinpoint choreography and promoting a "super bowl" halftime staged by the late Bob Fosse.

As additional drummers appear on the sides, the abridged reading builds to a frenzied, soaring, toad-

ence rhapsody.

In the closing music, Francis Le...

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The 34-person company performs its routines on a grid-patterned set.

whom are college-age, all of whom are amazing. Adam Rapa's stratospheric blues trumpet stands out, as does Nicholas E. Angelis and Christopher "Kit" Chatham's snare drum sorcery in the show-stopping "Battery Battle."

Chuck Mangione's "Land of Make Believe" benefits from soloist Frank Sullivan (Burlington), and Matthew A. Barks (noble), Deborah Burgess and Jeremiah L. Huber are notable featured dancers.

This heroic crew's maneuvers are expertly overseen by directors George Finney and Jonathan Vanderkirk, sharing choreographic credit with Tim Moore. Musical director James Prime's arrangements soundlessly take in everything from

Thompson's triplet set acts as an eardrum for his primary-accented monochromatic costumes, and

Hugh Vanston's lighting is a breathtaking show in itself, from backdrops to black lights.

This is specialized stuff, including the liabilities. Tom Moore's ultra-hyped amplification borders on overdrive, even in the grandly choreographed "Spartan Chain Spring."

"Blas!" is "Blas!" truly substantial beneath the glittering facade with a sense of repetition developing early in 1972.

For all the thrills, it is also ex-

hilarating, like an especially rare roller-coaster ride, as apt a simile for this other color show.



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