

'Blast!' delivers the brass at Brooks Center

By Paul Hyde

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The boisterous and crowd-pleasing "Blast!" overwhelmingly earned the exclamation point in its name Monday night at Clemson's Brooks Center.

What the heck, give it three exclamation points.

This brass-and-percussion spectacle mixed a marching band halftime show with the choreography, lighting and other trappings of musical theater for two hours of raucous entertainment.

A young and unfailingly cheery cast of 40 played horns, pounded drums and twirled flags, batons and gun-shaped props — dancing or marching all the while.

The brash, ribcage-

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rattling show had a definite appetite to please, and it repeatedly sent the full house into bursts of cheers and applause.

Among the highlights of the show: Trumpet player Courtlon Cochran impressively channeled Maynard Ferguson in his soaring version of "Everybody Loves the Blues."

Two percussionists (Lance Kindl and Brad Broomfield) engaged in heated competition in "Battery Battle," then joined with others for some dandy synchronized drumming.

In search of variety, the show took some amusing turns. One tune, "Lem-ontech," had company members twirling fluorescent batons to a techno score. In another number,

performers wielded Aboriginal didgeridoos, the long tube-like instruments that emit an animalistic groan.

The precisely choreographed twirling and tossing of batons, flags and other props by the show's visual ensemble often was stunning.

With artistic direction by James Mason, "Blast!" brought to mind other extroverted extravaganzas like "Stomp!," Blue Man Group and the Kodo drummers.

The show's *modus operandi* generally was to begin a number softly and gradually build up a towering wall of sound. When the entire group joined together in one powerful yawp, the effect was thrilling.

True, nuance and sub-

tlety were not exactly the order of the day. "Blast!" was probably too obstreperous for some, with the percussion often firing away like so many Gatling guns.

There were a few lyrical moments, however, such as a fine arrangement for the full ensemble of "Turkey in the Straw" coupled with the Shaker song made famous by Aaron Copland.

The large majority of the Brooks Center audience, which gratifyingly included scores of young people (band members perhaps?), responded enthusiastically to the show's over-the-top energy and dazzle — a blast indeed.

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