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'Blast!' coming to Symphony Hall

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By Keith O'Connor Follow

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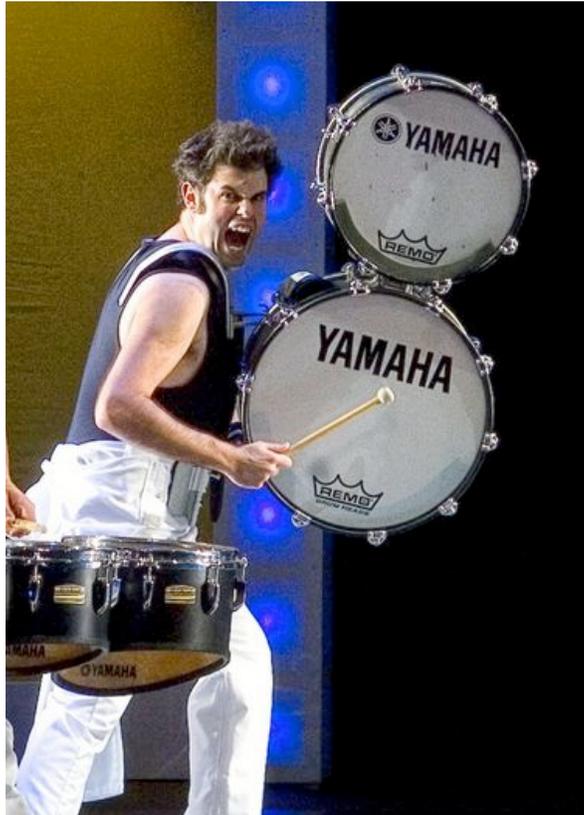
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Having a "blast" is a family affair for Andrew Barlow.

On Sunday, the percussionist will be drumming up a storm when the Tony Award-winning "Blast!" comes to Springfield, bringing its powerful musical performance of drum corps passion and precision from the outdoor arena to the theater stage at Symphony Hall.

Barlow, who completed his graduate work at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in percussion and music education, is no stranger to Blast!. While his current tour with the show began last year, his wife Melissa was in the cast for six years.

"She's at home now and I'm on the road for two to three months at a time, then with a month off. I dearly miss her, but we're making it work. She supports me with all that she does and understands and thinks this is a good opportunity for me," said Barlow, who is on tour in the United States through April, followed by performances in Japan through October.



Andrew Barlow of Blast

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"Blast!" all began with the Star of Indiana. Since the group's founding in the fall of 1984, James Mason has been the creative force behind the popular drum corps. A lifelong veteran of drum and bugle corps and other musical activities, Mason marched in a World Championship corps, then directed Star of Indiana to the World Championship title in 1991. Since 1993, he has been shaping the evolution of Star of Indiana from a com

Merging drum corps's pageantry, marching precision, and instrumental virtuosity with the repertoire, props, costuming, staging, dance moves, and special effects of musical theater, Mason's Blast! made its world premiere in December 1999 at the London Apollo Theatre and went on in 2001 to win a Tony Award for Best Special Theatrical Event and a 2001 Emmy Award for Best Choreography. The 60-member troupe of experienced young performers from three standard drum corps sections – brass, percussion, and visual ensemble – is said to have "overwhelmed" audiences unfamiliar with the demanding performance skills of drum corps.

IF YOU GO

Event: Blast **When:** Sunday, 7 p.m. **Where:** Symphony Hall, Springfield **Cost:** \$59, \$50, \$45 and \$28.50 **For more info:** Call (413) 788-7033 or www.citystage.symphonyhall.com

Born on athletic fields across the nation which were home to Star of Indiana – "Blast!" is steeped in the tradition of military and outdoor pageantry, drum corps, bands, and color guards which have a long history in America. Often rehearsing some 12

hours a day through heat, cold, dust and rain, they create thrilling performances where athleticism, musical talent, kaleidoscopic movement, and showmanship combine to create an art form that is both competitive and entertaining.

"Blast!" is not traditional musical theater, but it's not traditional drum corps either. As artistic director Mason explained on the "Blast!" website, "Nothing has ever been staged like this before. We're truly creating a new musical genre with "Blast!." Taking what Star of Indiana did on the football pitch, shrinking it to a theater, staging it with bold, theatrical lighting, set design and sound enhancement is really a change." According to Barlow, Blast! has "something for everyone from ages 3 to 93."

"The show has every type of musical genre in it from jazz to Latin and from techno to rock and roll....depending on who and where you are in life, the show will appeal to you on some level," he said, noting audiences will hear everything from Samuel Barber's "Medea" to Chuck Mangione's "Land of Make Believe."

In addition to studying percussion at UMass, Barlow also attended Mors Hill College in North Carolina. He said he was drawn to percussion early in life.

"We were introduced to all the instruments at school in the fifth grade. I didn't know you could actually learn how to drum in school. I started in the sixth grade and my parents were all for it and I latched on immediately," said Barlow.

Barlow currently resides in Allentown, Penn., with his wife.

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