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Arts Around Town: Andrew Barlow's having 'Blast!' with touring company

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Published On: Feb 09 2012 12:06:00 PM EST | Updated On: Feb 10 2012 05:47:38 PM EST

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Andrew Barlow

Andrew Barlow wants to come back to the classroom, but right now he's marching to the beat of a different drum as percussion swing manager for the current tour of the Tony Award-winning "Blast!" The Allentown resident, former assistant band director at Wilson Area High School in Northampton County, auditioned last year for the "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" of touring the country and abroad with one of the most energetic art forms to evolve from the showmanship of outdoor pageantry. Of the experience, he said being around so many musicians is literally forcing him to be a better musician.

After six weeks of intense rehearsals that began last August, followed by a pretty solid performance schedule in the Midwest and along the East Coast, Lehigh Valley audiences will have the chance to view Barlow in this fine celebration of movement and music on Fri., Feb. 10 at 8 p.m., when "Blast!" storms the stage of the **State Theatre** in Easton. The show received a 2001 Tony Award for best special theatrical event and an Emmy that same year for best choreography when it performed on PBS.

"Blast!" originated from the drum corps **Star of Indiana**, founded in 1984 in Bloomington, Ind., by businessman Bill Cook to benefit young people in music education. Star of Indiana, in its initial year, became the first corps ever to place among the top 10 corps at the prestigious **Drum Corps International World Championships**. It went on to become the world champion in 1991 and in 1993 graduated from a competitive drum corps to a theatrical show shaped by artistic director James Mason.

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Barlow, 26, described "Blast!" as appealing to all ages.

"It's a show of its own, with no plot or text but being guided by the music itself ranging from blues, jazz and rock 'n roll to techno-pop," said Barlow.

The 35-member cast on stage reflects the world of outdoor pageantry from across the country. Barlow will be performing as percussion swing, which entails knowing all the tracks used in that ensemble.

Barlow's wife, Melissa, was a cast member of "Blast!" and in the performing section of visual ensemble for six years. The visual enhances the production with the spinning and tossing of unusual elements along with the traditional sabers and colorful flags in perfectly synchronized, ballet-like drill. She is currently assistant manager of performing ensembles with **Youth Education in the Arts**, based in Allentown.



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Originally from "the (western) foothills of North Carolina," or Morganton, Barlow said he's been playing the drums since fifth grade when he signed up for band. He also can play piano. He pursued undergraduate studies in music education and percussion performance at Mars Hill (NC) College and at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for his master's degree. Locally, he served as a percussion instructor with both **the Cadets** and the **Reading Buccaneers Drum and Bugle Corps**, arranged and composed for Daniel Boone High School near Birdsboro, Berks Co., and served on the staff of Youth Education in the Arts.



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"I'm just soaking in the professionalism around me and the opportunities the show has presented to me," Barlow said. "My advice to any young person would be to not stop in music. I didn't particularly like band during my high school years but it exposed me to different genres of music, and that's when I really started to enjoy it. Explore all the differences, play all the instruments, find what makes you happy. This is what I want to bring back to the classroom."

The "Blast!" tour continues on the West Coast through April and then to Japan from June through October.

For further info: statetheatre.org

Arts Roundup:



The upcoming weekend is one of the heaviest with arts happenings throughout the area. In Berks County, the **Reading Symphony Orchestra** will premier a piece, in addition to presenting versatile cellist Josh Roman on Saturday, Feb. 11 at 8 p.m., at the **Sovereign Performing Arts Center** in Reading. The orchestra will premiere "Sidereus" by South African composer Osvaldo Golijov.

at the age of 22. In 2008, this devoted advocate of contemporary music resigned to pursue a solo career.



For further info: readingsymphony.org



"Revolutions have to be documented to be believed," said Gail Buckland, guest curator of the **Allentown Art Museum**'s upcoming exhibit, "Who Shot Rock & Roll: A Photographic History 1955 to Present," opening Sunday, Feb. 12 through May 13. A sneak preview rock party will be held Saturday from 7 to 11 p.m., with guests encouraged to dress as their favorite rock star. Related activities are scheduled through March.

Buckland, together with the [Brooklyn Museum of Art](#), organized the touring exhibit which puts photographers in the foreground and recognizes their creative and collaborative role in the history of rock music. There are 175 works represented by more than 100 photographers who cover the rock era from the 1950s to the present, plus some of the world's most iconic images ranging from Elvis Presley to Jimi Hendrix and U2.

"The music alone could not create the revolution," said Buckland, who grew up in the culture of rock 'n' roll. "The kids were reacting to the hairstyles and the clothes and the body language. And the people who gave rock its image are very, very important."



According to J. Brooks Joyner, Allentown Art Museum president and CEO, the impact of the exhibition is being felt across the Lehigh Valley with numerous rock-related events scheduled at various venues. The events are part of the "Rock Through the Valley" campaign started more than a year ago by the museum's marketing and development department who envisioned a Lehigh Valley collaboration.

Joyner said he hopes patrons will leave the exhibition "with a sense of joy and connection. If they're older than 60, they'll go back in time and reflect on the high points. If they're 15 or 16, it will be opening a whole new chapter on the past two generations."

For further info: allentownartmuseum.org

Abraham Lincoln reenactor **Robert Costello** takes the floor on Sat., Feb. 11 at 2 p.m., at the **Lehigh Valley Heritage Museum** in Allentown, as part of a Lincoln birthday celebration. (Lincoln's birthday is Feb. 12). The event starts at 1 p.m., with a PowerPoint program that chronicles the public image of our 16th president.

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