

Five alumni Blast! onto Broadway
after US tour

Hannum has hand in developing Tony-nominated show; new London, road versions in the works
by [Sarah R. Buchholz](#), *Chronicle* staff

Five alumni marched onto the Great White Way to rave reviews April 17, when their musical, "Blast!", debuted at the Broadway Theatre, located at 53rd and Broadway, in New York. Less than half-way through its scheduled 10-week run, the show has been nominated for a Tony Award for best choreography and awarded a Tony for best special theatrical event.

Nicholas E. Angelis, 27, contributes his percussion and vocal skills; Benjamin Taber Griffin, 24, plays a handful of brass instruments and the didgeridoo, and sings; Darren M. Hazlett, 23, performs with percussion, the didgeridoo and his voice; Sanford R. Jones, 29, sings and plays the tuba and didgeridoo; and Jack Mansager, 28, plays percussion instruments and sings. All five studied Music education or performance at the University.

"They're all really excellent players," said Thomas Hannum, associate director of the Minuteman Marching Band, who has also had a hand in "Blast!." Hannum is on the design team and is a musical arranger and music instructor for the show.

The 62 cast members are divided into percussion, brass, and dancing sections.

"This is actually a pretty monumental event," Hannum said, "because of the level on which it is happening and the uniqueness of the show." Hannum said "Blast!" comes across as "a marching band on stage."

The show grew out of the 1991 Drum Corps International champions Star of Indiana, which evolved considerably before a run in London last year. After the London stint, the show was further refined before touring the U.S. with stops in Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, and the Kennedy Center in Washington.

"It's taken years to understand how to make what we do work with a much smaller cast size," Hannum said. Drum corps typically have several hundred members.

Reviewers have had trouble describing the show, but not their enthusiasm for it.

"It's hard to know what to call this theatrical extravaganza: drum-and-bugle corp meets 'Stomp' meets 'River-dance,'" wrote Ellen Pfeifer of the Boston Phoenix. "But I was bedazzled from the first minute. A stunning ensemble."

"This new and startling show is explosive entertainment," wrote Richard Christiansen of The Chicago Tribune. "A huge hit."

The show's success has led to the formation of two new companies to perform it, Hannum

said. One will tour the U.S. and the other will take the show back to London for a run at the Dominion Theatre.