

On the Town



TUBE IT MAY CONCERN: Blue Man Group — from left, Phil Stanton, Chris Wink and Matt Goldman — enlivens the Astor Place Theater with its divine dementia.

Weird things seen once in a Blue Man

FASTEN your plastic smocks, it's going to be a messy ride. The first five rows of the Astor Place Theater are equipped with plastic protective gear because every oozing, jiggly, wet and squishy substance known to pre-schoolers is used by Blue Man Group, a trio of futuristic-punk pranksters sporting bald, blue heads.

Their performance is a 21st century food fight that effectively disputes the notion that cleanliness is next to godliness. Their work is divine dementia. The Blue Men (Matt Goldman, Phil Stanton and Chris Wink) have dubbed their performance "Tubes" and the theater is, appropriately, bedecked in a burly overgrowth of vacuum and plumber's tubing.

The tangled apparatus sets the tone for the glut of media, technology and consumerism that feeds Blue Man's humor.

Captain Crunch cereal, gum-balls, regurgitated marshmallows, Twinkies, banana creme, Jello molds — these, too, feed Blue Man's humor. The massive

PERFORMANCE ART review

doses of sucrose ingested by the performers seem to bring about an airborne sugar high. A thrill overcomes the audience as one submits to the bedlam.

Blue Man Group's completely unspoken antics recall Penn and Teller's macabre mischief. Their canvases recall Jackson Pollack.

Structured like a magic-show-cum-rock-concert, "Tubes" is a conglomerate of dazzling audiovisual feats using (mandatory) audience participation, computer

By ERIKA MILVY

graphics, faux documentaries and live backstage spoofs shown on video.

Much of the fun centers on the loose boundaries that define modern art. A fish tacked to a canvas is pondered thoughtfully: Computerized signboards above their heads voice Blue Man Group's unspoken thoughts as they grapple to classify the work of art.

These subtitles wryly mock the pretentiousness of art criticism: "In this 'collage du poisson,' the artist has captured the process of entropy on canvas — we watch the fish decay," one screen reads.

"I want to curate the fish," says another sign. "I want to filet the fish," a third answers.

The Blue Men play concave drums, into which they pour fluorescent paint. As they play, the paint flies with the brilliance of fireworks. An audience victim is painted from head to toe, strung up by his feet and flung on to a canvas.

Paint pellets are pitched into mouths and spit out onto canvases — which are then priced at \$4,000.

But "Tubes" is not limited to merely exhibiting splatter art. Blue Men take great pleasure in tweaking the collective noses of their audience. We are instructed to faithfully read just one of three series of rapidly moving posters.

These signs play on our anxieties about decision making and missed opportunities. Some offer tidbits of trivia, others tease: "Hey, read this one!"; "Have you been able to commit to one poster?"; "Once again you have chosen the wrong poster. While the people next to you read useful information, you are stuck with the equivalent of junk mail, as usual."

In the skewed sensibility of Blue Man, cereal and ear lobes make very good musical instruments. *Fahrvergnugen* and nouveau dadaism mean much the same thing and Twinkies are awarded more reverence than an Andrew Wyeth painting.

Like extraterrestrial visitors to planet Earth who are bombarded by a deluge of stimuli, Blue Man Group processes information with the refinement of a high-speed blender. Their concoction is a masterful minced meat of our culture.

Astor Place Theater, 434 Lafayette St., Thursdays through Fridays at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 7 and 10; Sundays at 3 and 7. Tickets: \$29.50-\$37.50. Phone: (212) 254-4370.