

FEELING BLUE



Photo by David Hawe and courtesy the "Blue Man Group"

Humorous and often goofy, the "Blue Man Group" at the Venetian invokes the feeling of carefree childlike inhibition as its three bald and blue performers communicate with the audience without words.

When you see "Blue Man Group" at the Venetian, the characters don't just put on a show – they expose the audience to a different side of reality where people are encouraged to rethink what's normal and let loose at the same time.

There are no sequins, showgirls or snazzy costumes, but "Blue Man Group" has its own way of being a totally Vegas show.

"Visitors come to Las Vegas to engage in one-of-a-kind experiences – "Blue Man Group" delivers on that promise every night with a measure of creativity that is second-to-none," said Jason Gastwirth, corporate vice president of entertainment for Las Vegas Sands Corp.

The experience begins when you enter the 1,760-seat Blue Man Theater. Once seated, the ushers hand out toilet paper, encouraging guests to decorate themselves with it. Digital signs hanging above the stage display prompts like "Shout like Arsenio Hall!" or "Yell like a cowboy!" and people are happy to do it. In fact you might be surprised to find your normally reserved friend suddenly participating with the crowd. Invoking that feeling of carefree childlike inhibition is one of the show's extraordinary qualities.

"That's what it's about, these Blue Men putting on rituals so we can get back to a time and that feeling when we didn't have to pay our bills and worry about everything. We're coming back to that innocence," said Tom Galassi, one of the "Blue Man Group" cast members who has been performing with the show for about 11 years.

"Blue Man Group" first appears on stage as large silhouettes behind a screen before they disappear to reveal three slim, shiny-blue-skinned men dressed in black standing behind cylinder drums. As one of the performers keeps the rhythm, another one pours paint onto the drum. With each new beat, a spray of vivid color explodes. The dark stage is a perfect contrast with the blue figures and splashing colors.

A live band, with its members situated on different levels of the stage, adds to the explosive performance. The musicians are

visible only through neon, glowing shapes on their otherwise black uniforms. As they move to the beat of the music, the neon shapes create what looks like techno-tribal-like figures dancing in the dark.

The show's unique message not only mesmerizes the audience but it's also what first interested Galassi. After college he moved to New York City and was auditioning for acting jobs when he saw "Blue Man Group." He explained that instead of just landing an acting gig, he wanted a job where he actually felt like he was accomplishing something meaningful.

"You study and do all these things and then you end up getting a commercial that's selling french fries, and you get paid for it. It just doesn't feel like you've done anything, but when I saw 'Blue Man Group' I thought this is [a show] that really means something," said Galassi, who has been playing the drums since he was a kid.

His experience with the show was similar to what the audience

feels. It was inexplicable but he knew that "Blue Man Group" had a magical and intriguing quality. Galassi explained that being able to find that "x factor" as a performer was one of the more grueling elements of the audition process because it's not something that can be taught.

"We don't want to imitate someone else because that's not honest. We're always striving for honesty and not playing a character, but actually finding this side of us that is innocent and that has some sort of power to lead a group in these rituals," said Galassi.

When the cast isn't entertaining the audience with sound, they are making them laugh with their curious and sometimes mischievous interaction with one another. Even though there's no talking and the performers maintain an

almost straight face throughout the show, there's a narrative conveyed in their actions. They perform amusing vignettes, winning lots of laughs with their sense of bewilderment and subtle gestures.

Communicating without words gets "pretty awkward and pretty honest," said Galassi. "I think that's the part we're trying to achieve, to get out of our own way and really be a group."

Being able to do this is no illusion. Galassi assured that "Blue Man Group" doesn't use any special hand signals or winks to communicate. Instead they work hard on creating a connection during training and before the show and then carrying that energy with them on stage. However, he admitted that despite the intense training, (three or four day a week for eight months) he has lost it a few times during the show as a result of an unidentified noise coming from the audience.

"Sometimes it gets goofy, but I think the best shows are where we're just about to laugh because everybody is just so wired and you can feel the energy of the room," said Galassi.

The concept for the show started with three friends Matt Goldman, Phil Stanton and Chris Wink who were living in New York City. They were experimenting with what they liked and didn't like about art and came up with the Blue Man Group explained Galassi.

"Blue Man Group" opened in 1991 at a 250-seat theater in New York City where the show still runs. Today it can be seen all over the world including Boston, Chicago, Orlando, Berlin and Tokyo along with several touring productions. It debuted in Las Vegas at the Luxor in 2000 and moved to the Venetian in 2005.

Galassi attributes the show's success in Las Vegas to its ability to appeal to a vast audience. They are able to impact people in different ways but there's something alluring about them that makes people want to come back and share the experience with their friends.

"Blue Man Group' appeals to all ages because it possesses the type of humor that can be enjoyed on many levels set within the context of extraordinary music and lighting. It's rare to find a show that is exciting to adults while also being family-friendly," said Gastwirth.

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