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'Blues Brothers Revue' raises the roof in Laguna

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For anyone who ever missed a chance to see John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd as the Blues Brothers, "The Official Blues Brothers Revue" has more than enough of the star duo's charisma, mock-straight button-down humor and great music to do the trick.

Of course, not counting the original 1980 Hollywood movie, that "anyone" means most of us, what with Belushi's death at age 33 in March of 1982.

His brother James took over as "Joliet" Jake Blues for the movie's sequel and for live appearances, but the more recent "Revue" fulfills many functions.

Call it a tribute, an homage, an uncannily accurate re-creation, a clone, a continuation of the original, or what have you – the roof-raising show at Laguna Playhouse has the same down-home energy and genuine rhythm-and-blues selections as any of Aykroyd and Belushi's performances.

The key to the show's success is the presences of Wayne Catania as Jake and Kieron Lafferty as Elwood. The duo were discovered in 2004 by Belushi's widow, Judith Belushi-Pisano, and husband, writer-producer Victor Pisano, while producing "The Blues Brothers Revival" in Chicago.

Aykroyd and Belushi-Pisano hand-picked Catania and Lafferty for "The Official" revue (so named because it's the only Blues Brothers show sanctioned by Aykroyd, Belushi-Pisano and Paul Shaffer, Aykroyd and Belushi's original musical director), and if you're lucky enough to see the show in Laguna, you'll understand why.

Not only are both outstanding musicians; their speaking and singing voices, looks and body language mirror Aykroyd and Belushi as alter egos Elwood and Jake Blues. Lesser performers might be tempted to allow their characterizations to veer into parody – but not Catania and Lafferty, baby.

Written by Aykroyd, co-written and directed by Belushi-Pisano, Catania and Lafferty, and music-directed by Shaffer, the "Revue" is a concert-format show. As with any rock concert, the whole idea is for everyone in the theater – performers and audience alike – to cut loose and have fun.

"Fun" seriously understates the show's raucous, rollicking feel, and in case you thought attendees would be casual observers, think again – Jake and Elwood invite us to sing along to many of the 22 musical numbers.

The nearly climactic performance of "Shout" has left and right halves of the audience being egged on by Jake and Elwood to outdo each other in delivering the loudest and most enthusiastic rendering of the great Isley Brothers song.

The outstanding six-man band sets the stage for Jake and Elwood's entrance. We next see the duo, projected on a large screen, rolling out of their cots, fully dressed, rushing to make it to their next gig.

Bounding onto the stage, the guys toss off the lively, kickin' "Hey Bartender," the hard-driving Spencer Davis Group rock number "Gimme Some Lovin'" and "Sweet Home Chicago," all in killer blues arrangements.

In fact, all of the arrangements are killer, not a dud in the lineup. Catania has the look and singing style of Belushi's Joliet Jake, and Lafferty's expert harmonica playing and physical features make him a ringer for Aykroyd.

Wearing the customary Blues Brothers uniforms – black suit, fedora, tie and shoes, dark sunglasses, and under-lip soul patch – Catania and Lafferty literally channel the celebrities in their most famous personas.

These are the Belushi and Aykroyd of the early days of "Saturday Night Live," and between that and the vintage of their songs – mostly '50s and '60s – there's plenty of nostalgia to be had.

Plenty of variety, too, between selections that range from "Rubber Biscuit" and "Miami" to "Green Onions" and "Do Ya Love Me," while the theme songs from "Peter Gunn" and "Rawhide" exemplify hits from Belushi and Aykroyd's own childhoods in the medium that made them famous – television.

The boys delved into '50s doo-wop with "Rubber Biscuit" and paid tribute to Wilson Pickett with "Land of a Thousand Dances," Ray Charles with "Shake a Tail Feather" and Cab Calloway with "Minnie the Moocher."

"The Official Blues Brothers Revue" closes with "Soul Man" – telling in that Sam and Dave, the soul and R&B duo who made the song a hit in 1967, had a strong influence on the Blues Brothers musical style. Accordingly, "Soul Man" is the number most closely associated with the Blues Brothers.

The evening's all-out fun air is bolstered by Catania and Lafferty's ability to capture the physicality of the original Blues Brothers, right down to the loosey-goosey dance moves. Catch the show any way you can, and you'll swear you were in the presence of the real thing.

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