



OREGON DAILY EMERALD

Ballet Fantastique presents Shakespeare with a twist

Wild west re-imagining of 'As You Like It' appeals to diverse crowd

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With a self-proclaimed reputation of being "not your grandmother's ballet company," Ballet Fantastique has a lot live up to, and it hopes to continue the tradition with its newest production, a re-imagining of a Shakespeare classic.

"As You Like It: A Wild West Ballet" is the brainchild of the mother-daughter team Donna Marisa Bontrager and Hannah Bontrager, who founded Ballet Fantastique 10 years ago.

Hannah Bontrager plays Rosie, Donna is the artistic director, and both are co-producers. They've been working on this ballet since February, which Hannah Bontrager said is a very short amount of time to produce something "so ambitious."

"Ballet Fantastique likes to do romantic comedies because we're a very playful company," Hannah Bontrager said. "We wanted to do a different spin on the story because we liked the challenge. We had a few different options, but the Wild West lent itself to a play the most." The classic Shakespeare comedy tells the story of a duke usurped and exiled by his younger

brother. When Rosalind, the exiled duke's daughter, is banished as well, she and her cousin Celia leave the court. In the forest where the duke has taken refuge, Rosalind, disguised as a man, reunites with her love Orlando, and Celia, disguised as a poor woman, meets and falls in love with his estranged brother, Oliver.

In Ballet Fantastique's version of the story, the characters' names and the narration of the story have been changed to reflect the Western theme.

The Bontragers met with Lynn Freitas and Rachel Hanan, Shakespeare scholars from the University, to ensure that the creative changes were true to the classic.

Although the company has plenty of experience telling stories through ballet, Hannah Bontrager said telling a Shakespearean story was more challenging.

"Shakespeare has so many twists and turns, and we didn't want to lose any nuances," Hannah Bontrager said. "A lot of his themes work really well in dance, like Rosie teasing Lando, but it is harder when I'm dancing as Rosie, dressed as a boy, teaching him how to love. That's been a challenge."

Amanda Coleman, who has been dancing with Ballet Fantastique since December, plays Cece, the equivalent to Celia. Coleman said because of the company's small size, all of the dancers "get the chance to really shine."

"I'm excited to do this ballet because I've never done such an original work," she said. "Dancers have been doing Shakespeare for years, copying other ballets. This isn't like that."

Although most of the dancers are from the Northwest area, guest dancer Alberto Liberatoscioli, originally from Italy, is visiting from his company, Ballet Nebraska. He got into contact with Ballet Fantastique by chance and after keeping in touch, he was offered the chance to perform with them.

"Being a guest dancer is different because you don't know the company's habits, but it's interesting because you discover new ways of working," he said.

The members of Ballet Fantastique are confident everyone will enjoy "As You Like It: A Wild West Ballet" regardless of whether they are a ballet fan, a Shakespeare fan or neither.

"It's been fun to see things come together," Hannah Bontrager said. "It's an absolutely incredible show.

While we haven't seen the response from a full audience yet, the response we've received from people at rehearsals just reinforces that it's such a fun and unique show; one I think Shakespeare would approve of."