



CHAMBER COMPANY

www.balletfantastique.org

Annex Studio: 60 E. 10th Ave., Eugene, OR 97401
City Center for Dance: 960 Oak St., Eugene, OR 97401
(541) 342 - 4611

Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager

For Immediate Release: March 25, 2011

CONTACT

Hannah Bontrager, *As You Like It: A Wild West Ballet* co-producer and Ballet Fantastique dancer
Mobile phone (not for publication): (541) 206-8977
Direct email (not for publication): balletfantastique@gmail.com

—And—

Donna Marisa Bontrager, *As You Like It: A Wild West Ballet* co-producer and Ballet Fantastique
Artistic Director
Mobile phone (not for publication): (541) 915-6814

QUICK FACTS: AS YOU LIKE IT: A WILD WEST BALLET

When: Saturday, April 16 at 2:30 and 7:30 pm

Where: Soreng Theater, Hult Center

Tickets: Start at \$27, with significant discounts for youth, students, young professionals, and seniors (starting at \$14), and \$5 off each ticket for groups of six or more. Available now through the Hult Center Box Office, 541-682-5000 or hultcenter.org

Choreography and Production: All original, by Donna Marisa Bontrager and Hannah Bontrager

**Ballet Fantastique presents an imaginative Wild West take on
Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It***

Ballet Fantastique's 10th Anniversary Season finishes with a "yeehaw" in the Hult Center's Soreng Theater on April 16 with a playful and much-anticipated wild west interpretation of one of William Shakespeare's most beloved romantic comedies, *As You Like It*.

This ballet's original choreography by Donna Marisa Bontrager and Hannah Bontrager infuses the formality of classical ballet with the flavor, sentiment and candor of the informal American west.

"I'm giving our classically-trained dancers a challenge by adding unexpected steps to their choreography," says Donna. "The footwork is fast, and the combinations are very specific but also have to be danced with release and freedom."

"Of course, there's also the challenge of telling *As You Like It* through dance and with a western setting—as far as we know, this is a completely unique creation in the world of ballet," she adds.

Throughout history, the American West has been celebrated as a romantic place where anything is possible—where the individual literally has space to seek freedom, to discover him or herself, and to create his or her own identity.

“The wild west setting is ideal for our ballet version of *As You Like It*,” says Hannah. “It sets the perfect context for Shakespeare’s themes of the transformative power of nature, the curative force of love, the malleability of human experience—and some of Shakespeare’s strongest female characters!”

As You Like It is a pastoral comedy about two feuding brothers who have two lovable daughters who teach two other estranged brothers how to love. Shakespeare scholars often praise Rosalind (“Rosie” in Ballet Fantastique’s version) as Shakespeare’s most fully-developed female character.

Through dramatic dancing and expressive choreography, Ballet Fantastique’s seven strong women fully embody each of their characters: Rosie, Celia, Audrey, Phebe, and La Belle (note the change from the masculine “Le Beau” in Shakespeare’s version), and two completely original characters for the ballet: Cupid (representing the powerful role of love in *As You Like It*), and Annie Oakley!

“Annie Oakley is a fascinating female historical character,” says Ashley Bontrager, dancing the part. “She had a reputation for being not only a formidable sharp-shooter, but also quite feminine. She helps us add another female character to the play, and really gives it a western edge.”

To give their ballet version further western twang, Donna and Hannah have set Act I in a turn-of-the-century western saloon—the town gathering place; and Act II takes place not in the Forest of Ardenne, but rather the Range of Ardenne. The show opens with a short black and white silent film by Vanguard Media, setting up the story.

“In our choreography, you’ll see iconic features of the wild west, and you’ll hear the famous sounds of American composers like Hershy Kay, Aaron Copland, and George Gershwin,” says Donna. “Saloon girl legs will can-can and cowboys spar. Later, out on the range, a winsome cowherd dances with his milkmaid, and prairie skirts whirl in a wild rodeo hoedown.”

With his harmonica and banjo, Ballet Fantastique has turned Touchstone into a bard-narrator, who will weave the story’s narrative arc. Portland-based actor and musician Adam Goldthwaite will play the role. Joining him is composer Jeremy DeKyle Schropp, PhD music student from the UO, who has created a series of original musical vignettes for live honkytonk piano that will work with Touchstone’s narration.

The Bontragers have also called on two Shakespeare scholars from the University of Oregon, Lynn Freitas and Rachel Hanan. Line-by-line, Hannah has worked with Freitas and Hanan to ensure that the ballet remains true to Shakespeare’s concepts and characters, and to create the Touchstone narration.

As You Like It: A Wild West Ballet is a playful, rambunctious choreographic tribute to Shakespeare’s fun, vivacious, entertaining story.

NOTE: With support from the Portland-based Celebration Foundation, Ballet Fantastique is also producing two youth education performances for area middle and high school students on April 14.

###