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Ballet Fantastique presents *Bossa Brasil*, a jazzy, passionate collaboration

Ballet Fantastique's second performance of its 2010-2011 10th Anniversary Season, *Bossa Brasil*, heats up the Soreng Theater at Eugene's Hult Center on January 29 at 7:30 pm. All-new choreography by Donna and Hannah Bontrager and diverse music pay tribute to Brazil's unique, multi-faceted culture.

"*Bossa Brasil* is inspired by jazzy bossa nova, and also references Brazil's American Indian, Portuguese and African roots," says Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager. "The choreography shows off our artistic virtuosity and range while also showing off the tremendous diversity of this region that we're falling more in love with every day in the creation of this ballet!"

Bossa Brasil features Ballet Fantastique trademarks: playful original choreography, diverse variations on a common theme, and dancers onstage alongside live musicians—but in a new context for the seven-dancer chamber company. The concert's danced styles range from Latin American folk, to contemporary, to flamenco ballet. The dancers are joined by six Northwest-based musicians, and a guest break dancer. Eugene-based composer Charles Gurke is also a *Bossa Brasil* collaborator.

"The pieces each have their own very spicy, exciting feel to them and that will definitely come across from our energy into the audience," adds dancer Jordyn Richter.

Bossa nova emerged in the 1950s in Rio de Janeiro and evolved from a fusion of samba and jazz music. Literally meaning "new wave," Bossa nova emerged primarily from the upscale beachside neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro. A warm homage to the famous bossa nova song *Girl from Ipanema* by Stan Getz & João Gilberto transports the audience to a bright 1950's Ipanema beach, with Hannah and Ashley Bontrager and Amelia Unsicker dancing in vintage bathing suits with their towels and sunglasses.

There's also *new* bossa nova on the evening's menu, too: Famed Northwest-Cuban bossa nova and Latin singer Jessie Marquez and her band join the dancers on stage to animate the concert with their soft, swaying musicality.

Latin jazz vocalist/composer Jessie Marquez blends Cuban, Brazilian and pop sounds for music with lush harmonies and cool grooves. Marquez got on-the-job training in Havana, where she recorded with

members of the Afro Cuban Allstars. Her album *Sana Locura* (2004) reached the top of Latin jazz and Salsa charts in the US and Europe. A frequent visitor to the island, she has appeared on Cuban television and radio and has performed throughout the country.

"I'm looking forward to singing for Ballet Fantastique's *Bossa Brasil*. I'll be accompanied by Greg Goebel (piano), Mark Schneider (bass) and Rafael Trujillo (percussion). There's a special collaboration that happens between musicians and dancers. They inspire one another, exchange energy and broaden each other's scope," says Marquez.

In another, very different work, Ballet Fantastique debuts the work of Eugene-based composer Charles Gurke in *Cincuenta Años de Soledad* ("Fifty Years of Solitude"), danced by Amanda Coleman. The two-part piece has Coleman danced first as a caged bird in a large birdcage structure; she here represents one of the Amazon rainforest's many endangered birds experiencing a hostile and restrictive environment. In part two, Coleman gains her freedom and dances unencumbered with joyous abandon.

"*Cincuenta Años de Soledad* is a work for solo flute in two contrasting movements, influenced by my work with Cuban music and traditions. I'm thrilled with the way the choreography interprets the narrative of the music," says Gurke. The piece will be played live by guest flutist Emily McPherson.

The three-part *Gaicho Suite* ("De Ushuaia a la Quiaca," "Gaicho," and "Pampa") by Gustavo Santaolalla, delves into Brazil's folk history. Expressive folk dance is accompanied by the characteristic sound of the charango, a folk string instrument, exposing the fierce individuality and strength of Brazilian heritage.

In the highly technically demanding *Juan's Loco* by Rodrigo y Gabriella and *Tango Forte* by Dublex Inc., Ballet Fantastique dancers perform traditional Flamenco ballet with a twist.

Astor Piazzolla's driving and dramatic *Libertango* is a video collaboration with Eugene's Vanguard Media. Five Ballet Fantastique dancers perform the piece in front of a high-contrast black-and-white video of themselves performing the piece. The video highlights and features details of the choreography.

"Having worked for some time in the documentation of dance performance, one of the reoccurring themes we've noticed in our work is the contrast between what is seen in a live show and the resulting video. In repeatedly and carefully reviewing each cut, the editor sees a much-slowed down version of the performance. He is given the opportunity to see intricacies in the choreography that are simply not visible to those watching the performance. The goal of our video art collaboration with Ballet Fantastique is to capture the details that pass by the audience unnoticed and let them share the stage with the dancers," says Nikos Aragon-Herbert, Creative Director for Vanguard Media.

The professional Ballet Fantastique company dancers also share the stage with piano prodigy Priscilla Dantas, a seventeen-year-old artist from Sao Paulo who will bring her Brazilian roots alive through a rich interpretation of a piece from her homeland, "Jongo" by Lorenzo Fernandez (part of *Suite Brasileira*), with dancers Amelia Unsicker and Jordyn Richter. Donna and Hannah Bontrager's choreography for the piece explores Brazil's African slave heritage and juxtaposes themes of both hope and desperation.

The performance's diverse dance themes don't stop at flamenco and African, however. Ballet Fantastique dancer Ashley Bontrager is joined on stage in a danceoff with break dancer Librado Biasca in *Mi Confession* to the tango fusion sounds of Gotan Project.

“We're going to take the viewers to Brazil, where the sun is shining, the music is sultry, fun and intriguing, and the dancing is captivating,” says dancer Amelia Unsicker of the performance.

Join Ballet Fantastique Saturday, January 29th at 7:30pm for *Bossa Brasil*, a playful, fun and exciting winter concert that incorporates stunning artistry of music and dance. Prices begin at \$27 with significant discounts for students and youth (beginning at \$14), and seniors and young professionals (beginning at \$22) available, and discounts for groups of six or more. Tickets can be purchased through the Hult Center Box Office at www.hultcenter.org or (541) 682-5000.

For further information about Ballet Fantastique and *Bossa Brasil*, please visit www.balletfantastique.org. Executive Director Hannah Bontrager may be reached directly for comment at (541) 206-8977 or balletfantastique@gmail.com (not for publication, please).