



Photo: Bob Williams

DANCE

Latin jazz meets ballet

Guitar trio from California will provide the music

By [Bob Keefer](#)

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Eugene's Ballet Fantastique has made a name for itself over the past decade by collaborating with other artistic groups, especially local musicians. It has worked with the Eugene Symphony, the Oregon Mozart Players and Trio Voronezh.

When it starts off its new season this weekend at the Hult Center, the chamber ballet company will be reaching farther afield — geographically speaking — than it ever has before.

In the second half of the show, Ballet Fantastique will be dancing to a live performance by Incendio, a Latin-jazz fusion guitar trio from Southern California.

"My mom had heard in an interview that they were going to be playing in the area last fall," explains Hannah Bontrager, the company's executive director. "She wasn't able to go, but she said, 'Hannah, you have to go. These people sound incredible!'"

Bontrager, who dances in the company herself, took her sister, Ashley Bontrager, and one of the other dancers from the troupe and headed for Cozmic Pizza, where Incendio was booked.

“We were just expecting this little band,” she said. “And we were absolutely blown away.” Before the night was over, Bontrager had introduced herself to the musicians and popped an unusual question: “Have you ever considered collaborating with a ballet company?”

The result goes on stage Saturday night and Sunday afternoon at the Hult Center’s 498-seat Soreng Theater.

“Their music is very danceable and very virtuosic,” Bontrager says. “We love the fusion of the styles they bring into their music. It’s primarily Latin, but there is a Middle Eastern sound to some of their music. There’s a jazz influence. Even a Celtic influence. My mom (that would be Ballet Fantastique’s artistic director, Donna Marisa Bontrager) and I are always looking for something that is dynamic and compelling. If it has those two qualities and a strong sense of rhythm, then you can dance with it. It doesn’t matter if it’s Gershwin or Metallica.”

You do, though, still have to rehearse, and the ballet dancers and musicians live more than 1,000 miles apart. So over the past few months, e-mails and phone calls have been flying back and forth, along with musical recordings.

One challenge involved with dancing to live music played by a group that’s used to improvising is that ballet dancers really don’t want to improvise anything during a performance, at all.

“One of the things that people don’t think about that is very important for dancers is that the tempos have to be strong and clear,” Bontrager said. “A lot of groups that don’t perform with dancers a lot don’t care about that so much. They get caught up in improvisation. But we need to know that the number of bars is going to be exactly the same and that the tempo is going to be consistent.”

So in the back-and-forth discussion, Bontrager took a recording sent by Incendio and slowed it down. “We e-mailed a recording of how the artistic director wants the piece to sound, and they re-recorded it in their studio, informally, for us. We did a preview performance at the March of Dimes and people were just floored at how good it sounded.”

The musicians and dancers won’t actually get to work together in person until Incendio arrives in Eugene this afternoon, just in time for a tech rehearsal at the Hult.

That shouldn’t be a problem, Bontrager said.

“Our dancers are so used to working with live musicians at this point. That is something we have done a lot of. They are confident enough.”

Incendio is composed of guitarists Jean-Pierre Durand and Jim Stubblefield, and guitarist, bassist and vocalist Liza Carbé.

They will be playing such pieces as “Tango Para Abel,” “Misterioso,” “Magie Noir: and “Vihuela,” while the dancers perform choreography by Hannah and Donna Marisa Bontrager.

DANCE PREVIEW

Incendio

What: Eugene’s Ballet Fantastique in a performance with the L.A. band Incendio

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday and 2:30 p.m. Sunday

Where: Soreng Theater, Hult Center, Seventh Avenue and Willamette Street

Tickets: \$27 to \$33 at 541-682-5000 and BalletFantastique.org

