

Ballet Fantastique brings a touch of Brazil to Eugene

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WODEN PHOTO

Tired of dreary Eugene winter weather? Take a trip to Brazil this weekend with Ballet Fantastique.

The Eugene chamber ballet company is putting on Bossa Brasil, a sun- and fun-inspired program of Latin American music and dance at the Hult Center's Soreng Theater this Saturday night.

Ballet Fantastique is known for collaborating with other musicians, and this show will include performances by a number of local artists, including Northwest bossa nova singer Jessie Marquez and her band, and young Sao Paulo pianist Priscilla Dantas.

"As performers and also as Eugene residents, we know that January tends to be a little drab," said Hannah Bontrager, the company's executive director and one of its dancers. "We wanted to find something that would be a good contrast to Eugene in January."

Bontrager said the idea apparently has caught on. "Tickets are flying out the door," she said. The show will include such numbers as "The Girl From Ipanema," with ballet dancers donning vintage bathing suits with their pointe shoes for a stroll on a tropical beach.

"We'll have our towels, our boombox, our cocktails. We have a whole beach scene," Bontrager said.

Marquez and her band will join dancers on stage for the show. The musician's 2004 album "Sana Locura" hit the top of Latin jazz and salsa charts in the United States and Europe.

She'll be playing with Greg Goebel on piano, Mark Schneider on bass and Rafael Trujillo on percussion.

The ballet will also debut Eugene composer Charles Gurke's "Cincuenta Anos de Soledad (Fifty Years of Solitude)."

The piece sets dancer Amanda Coleman as a bird trapped in a large cage. By the end of the work, she has flown free.

Bontrager said the work is a tribute to a darker side of Brazil: the endangered status of many bird species in the Amazon basin.

"We wanted to use this opportunity with Charlie to bring attention to endangered species in the Amazon. The piece is really beautiful," she said. "We wanted the show to have not just the high points, not just all fun and play, not just 'The Girl From Ipanema,' but also to have some weight to it."

The concert also will include video footage of the dancers by Vanguard Media, a Eugene production company.