

BALLET *Fantastique*

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Cirque De La Lune Quick Facts:

- DATES: Saturday Oct. 20 at 7:30 pm and Sunday Oct. 21 at 2:30 pm
- CHOREOGRAPHY: All-original choreography by Ballet Fantastique co-directors/producers Donna and Hannah Bontrager
- LIVE MUSIC: Troupe Carnivale, Betty and the Boy, and Mood Area 52
- GUEST CIRCUS AERIALIST: Raymond Silos from Miami
- Tickets on sale now at the Hult Center Box Office, (541) 682-5000 or www.hultcenter.org (discounts for students, youth, seniors, and groups of six or more)

Ballet Fantastique premieres their new contemporary ballet set in a 1930s Depression-era circus

Eugene's contemporary chamber ballet company is at it again. Ballet Fantastique will open its 12-13 season, *VENTURE*, with a contemporary ballet premiere set in the alternatively sweeping and struggling worlds of a 1930s depression-era circus. While the setting is a new undertaking for the company, Ballet Fantastique's *Cirque de la Lune* will boast the group's signature all-original choreography, intriguing guest artists—including guest circus aerialist Raymond Silos from Miami—and bold musical choices——“folkestras” Troupe Carnivale, Betty and the Boy, and Mood Area 52, all of whom are collaborating with a ballet company for the first time.

The show's title is a play on “Cirque du Soleil” (“circus of the moon” instead of “circus of the sun”), and reflects a strong interest across the arts world in “cirque” productions. Unbeknownst to the Bontragers while planning for the season last winter, for example, the Eugene Symphony also has circus arts in their 2012-2013 season mix. Yet true to form, Ballet Fantastique choreographer-producers and mother-daughter team Donna Marisa and Hannah have created an unusual approach to the conceptual premise of a circus show. Instead, they're doing a show about a circus.

“Rather than doing a concert that simply presents a circus, we wanted to really delve into the dynamics of the Depression era,” says Hannah. “There's this time when America is struggling. And while people needed the escape of the circus more than ever, many circuses were nonetheless struggling to keep their audiences. We're

known for the dramatic prowess of our dancers, so we're challenging them to create full, nuanced characters with a history and a backstory for these characters."

Accordingly, instead of presenting a "circus ballet," the Bontragers' seventy-minute ballet will follow a touring circus and dance company as the artists prepare in the hour *before* their circus act begins. Audiences will see interactions between the musicians, characters, and the performers in faux "rehearsal" for the presumed show.

Moreover, the Bontragers' production concept is driven by these character sketches and interactions more than an aggressive narrative arc. "Rather than creating a narrative story-driven ballet, we decided to develop characters from this era when a circus traveled to almost every community in America. Our *Cirque* will be full of personality as we explore these characters and their interactions with each other," says Donna. Characters to be danced include the ringmaster, a fortune teller, magician, the clown "Romeo," and a host of others.

As is typical with Ballet Fantastique, choreography runs the gamut of styles, and is full of intricate detail. "With the choreography, we're doing things that put it a little bit off. We'll dance a sequence of movement, and Donna will tell us that it looks too 'pretty,' or too 'expected,'" says company dancer Leanne Mizzoni. "It's fun and it's challenging to find this grittiness in our style."

"Our aesthetic this season is 'retro-futuristic,'" says Hannah. "We are creating contemporary movement inspired by these historical times in which our ballets are set—and having a lot of fun with it in the process. And we've found the perfect musicians with whom to embark on this adventure. They're integral in creating the energy of these scenarios in which the characters act and interact."

Musicians from the three bands will number a total of seventeen, and are presenting interesting challenges for the production team, including creating an orchestra pit (of sorts) in the Soreng Theater, which hasn't been done in over twenty years. Instruments represented include an appropriately ragamuffin mix of strings (including three standing basses), two drum kits, accordion, toy piano, mandolin, banjo, and percussion that will present more than one surprise for audience members. Each of the works on the program is a work of original music by the band performing it. In all, *Cirque's* music is as unexpected as it is hauntingly familiar—weaving together diverse stylistic influences from folk, bluegrass, neo-tango, Brechtian cabaret tunes, and what one band calls a "unique blend of carnival-esque interpretations of alt-country."

"This isn't your grandmother's ballet," says Jackie Cowsill of Troupe Carnivale. "And their style fits perfectly with the music Donna and Hannah have chosen from each of us in the participating bands. It combines elements of long-standing tradition with new, modern elements and ideas."

Along with the guest orchestras, *Cirque de la Lune* will also feature international circus aerialist Raymond Silos. Silos will appear in several pieces with the Ballet Fantastique dancers, as Donna and Hannah's choreography weaves together contemporary ballet movement with feats of aerial dance and stunts. "I admire the edgy and fun style of Ballet Fantastique," says Silos, "It takes creativity to make a show original, but to get me excited to perform in it, brilliance. *Cirque de la Lune* promises just that."

"Being asked to be a part of the Ballet Fantastique's *Cirque de la Lune* performance is literally like, 'a dream collaboration' for us. I wouldn't expect it to be anything less than spectacular," says Betreena Jaeger, the "Betty" in *Betty and the Boy*, who recently won *Eugene Weekly's* Best New Thing. Michael Roderick from Mood Area 52 echoes similar sentiments: "This is really interesting artistic collaboration. Ballet Fantastique creates dance that is daring and also has integrity of craft. We try to do the same."

Comprised of ten professional dancers from across the US, Ballet Fantastique has made a name for itself with out-of-the-box contemporary spins on classic stories. The 2012–2013 season will be Ballet Fantastique's final year of the three-year Hult Center resident company application process. Two out of three of 2011-2012 productions sold out their runs at the Hult Center, earning consecutive standing ovations. The company has performed throughout the Northwest, and will continue its 2012-13 *VENTURE* season with *The Misadventures of Casanova*, which will be featured in February, and *Pride & Prejudice: A Parisian Jazz Ballet* set in Paris in the roaring 20's in May. The company will become the first US dance company to perform in San Benedetto del Tronto, where they have been invited to perform their original *As You Like It: A Wild West Ballet* in July 2013.

Cirque de la Lune is appropriate for all ages; run time is 90 minutes, including a 20-minute intermission.

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