

BALLET

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FANTASTIQUE

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QUICK FACTS:

- **WHAT:** Ballet Fantastique's all-new contemporary ballet, *Tales from the Floating World*, with LIVE MUSIC: award winning Portland Taiko, award-winning koto player Mitsuki Dazai
- **WHEN:** Fri. Jan. 7, 7:30pm; Sat. Jan. 8, 7:30pm; Sun. Jan. 9, 2:30pm
- **WHERE:** Soreng Theater, Hult Center
- **CHOREOGRAPHY:** All-original, from choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager
- **TICKETS:** \$28-\$48 (discounts for students/youth *and* groups of 6+). On sale now through the Hult Center Box Office: 541-682-5000 or www.hultcenter.org. Advance ticket purchase highly recommended (Ballet Fantastique productions do sell out).

Ancient Japanese legends come alive in Ballet Fantastique's collaboration with Portland Taiko and koto player Mitsuki Dazai

"Living only for the moment, turning our full attention to the pleasures of the moon, the snow, the cherry blossoms and the maple leaves; singing songs, drinking wine, diverting ourselves in just floating, floating; refusing to be disheartened, like a gourd floating along with the river current: this is what we call the floating world." —Poet Asai Ryōi (17th century)

Ballet Fantastique's NEW LEGENDS season continues Feb. 7–9 at the Hult with *Tales from the Floating World*, a landmark premiere inspired by the haunting and powerful music of Portland Taiko and award-winning koto player Mitsuki Dazai. Partnering with these acclaimed musicians and composers, Ballet Fantastique choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager bring to life Japanese legends of samurai adventure, romance, and the supernatural.

Emerging from the cultural efflorescence of the Tokugawa shogunate, the idea of the "Floating World" (*Ukiyo* 浮世) was an expression of the new economic power, social ambitions, and urban lifestyle of the rising middle class during the Edo period (1615-1868). Comprised of a diverse array of folk tales, depictions of the sumo wrestlers and kabuki actors who entertained city dwellers, and nature studies and landscapes, the *ukiyo* ethos was proudly urban, celebrating and ritualizing the middle class's escape from the constraints of the samurai estate. Many writers have linked the two ways of writing *ukiyo* as the two sides of single idea, a meditation on the sorrow and illusory nature of daily life combined with an urban idyll of temporary escape and enjoyment.

The ballet takes its translated title from Asai Ryōi's 1661 novel, *Ukiyo Monogatari*. While not an interpretation of the Asai novel, the ballet draws inspiration from it and the other *ukiyo-e* of the author's time. The Bontragers' new choreography melds classical ballet with Japanese dance forms, including kabuki movement and geisha performance, as Ballet Fantastique's dancers recast seven fantastic tales for a contemporary audience. Made in collaboration with the innovative Portland Taiko and koto player Mitsuki Dazai, who fuse the fierce rhythm and indelible melody of classic Japanese music with contemporary compositions, *Tales from the Floating World* embodies a style as ephemeral and timeless as the stories from which it draws.

“The legends from Japan’s past and stories of the Floating World era we’ve chosen are powerful, evocative, wildly imaginative. They have a moral, but they’re nuanced. They’re almost painful in their haunting beauty. We’re trying to bring all of this understated drama and passion to life in the choreography,” says Ballet Fantastique artistic director and choreographer Donna Marisa Bontrager.

Stories include: The Celestial-Feathered Robe, in which a beautiful *tennyo* (angelic creature) leaves her cloak meets a poor fisherman who has inadvertently stolen her wings; the Tale of Courage and the Red Dragon, where the beautiful Red Dragon seduces a samurai into fighting the giant Centipede in her underwater palace; the Wisteria Maiden, who, alone, dances the story of love from passion to betrayal; the Legend of Thunder, wherein the Mountain Wizard imprisons the Rain Goddess until Princess Taema melts him with her beauty and he awakens to find her gone, erupting in thunder; the Moon Princess, found by the Bamboo Cutter and beloved by the Emperor of Japan until she must return home; and the Tale of the Morning Glory, a Japanese kabuki story as well known in the culture as “Romeo and Juliet.”

“With this production, Ballet Fantastique is taking everything to the next level, like we do in every production,” says Ballet Fantastique soloist Fabio Simoes. “The style is definitely different, and I’ve enjoyed having to step out of our comfort zone!” Simoes will dance the roles of the baleful Centipede in *Courage and the Red Dragon* and the poor fisherman Hakuryo in *The Celestial-Feathered Robe*.

ABOUT THE MUSICIANS

Koto player Mitsuki Dazai is a graduate of both Tokyo’s prestigious Kunitachi College of Music, and of the Sawai Koto Conservatory, where she studied with the world-renowned virtuoso Kazue Sawai, and received her certificate in koto instruction. Dazai moved to Oregon in 2002, serving as a guest lecturer at the University of Oregon and Marylhurst University, and touring throughout the US, Europe, and Japan. Dazai has been featured on Oregon ArtBeat, and released two CDs—2007’s *Autumn*, and 2010’s *Far Away . . . Romances for Koto* (made in collaboration with Grammy nominated composer Michael Hoppé). Dazai adds: **“I’ve always wanted to collaborate with other artists so I’m very excited to work with Ballet Fantastique. Koto is a very unique instrument with special sounds. It will be a wonderful musical journey for both the audience and myself. I’m excited to see music from the east and dance from the west come together!”**

Founded in 1994, Portland Taiko has brought its innovative take on taiko music to over 1500 performances and a total audience of over 1,000,000 people. The ensemble has performed to sold out audiences not only throughout the Northwest, but on prestigious stages such as the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. They have collaborated with a range a broad range of artists from both North America and Japan. Portland Taiko has released the CDs *Making Waves*, *Big Bang* (2003) and *Rhythms of Change* (2008), as well as the 2006 DVD *Taikokinesis*. Of the collaboration with Ballet Fantastique, Michelle Fujii, Artistic Director of Portland Taiko, says **“Portland Taiko is excited to blend the power of our drums with the delicacy and fierceness of Ballet Fantastique. This program provides an opportunity to blend our respective traditions in unique and innovative ways. It’s exciting to see a ballet company in Oregon boldly exploring new ways to express their artistry.”**

Costumes are designed by Donna Marisa Bontrager in collaboration with Ballet Fantastique’s resident designers, Allison Ditson and Rita Perini-Vance. UO History grad and dramaturge Genna Speer supports Donna and Hannah with libretto and research. Lights will be designed by Mollie Clevidence. Grant support from the Oregon Cultural Trust.

Also coming up:

- Wed. Jan. 22 at 6:30 pm: Open Barre, Ballet Fantastique's unique Wednesday night open rehearsal series. Guests enjoy wine tastings of local wine from William Rose Wines at Oregon Wine LAB, 488 Lincoln, and an open rehearsal with Donna and Hannah and the dancers, as well as koto player Mitsuki Dazai. Suggested donation: \$10—free for season subscribers. More info: www.balletfantastique.org
- Sun. Feb. 16 at 5:00 pm: Cooking with the Choreographers, four-course cooking demonstration, dinner, and wine pairings at Party Downtown with Oregon Wine LAB/William Rose Wines. Tickets (extremely limited): \$75/individual or \$140/couple if purchased before Feb. 12. More info: www.balletfantastique.org

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Bibliographic suggestion: Kita, S.: "Reconsidering Ukiyo-e," in: Kita, S.: *A Hidden Treasure: Japanese Prints from the Carnegie Museum of Art*. Pittsburgh, 1996, pp. 15-33.