

Ballet Fantastique lives up to troupe's name

By Gwen Curran

The Register-Guard

A warm May afternoon in Eugene was a perfect time to attend “Tour de Suites” by Ballet Fantastique at the Hult Center.

It was fantastic. Artistic director Donna Marisa Bontrager must be very proud of her small company of dancers.

The program began with a playful exposition on writing based on composer Alexander Glazunov’s “Four Novelettes.”

Alonzo Moore, dancing as the writer, was inspired by his four lovely muses. This light opening piece fit the May mood of the audience. Delightful choreography and romantic costuming showed off the ensemble very well.

Alonzo seemed more than capable of handling his four beauties — Ashley and Hannah Bontrager, Julia Hakes and Nicola Thieme. The steps were executed with grace and precision. A touch of humor permeated this piece, which was commissioned by the Oregon Mozart Players and premiered this spring.

The next three dances took us to the land of fairy tales. “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” and a “Fairy Doll Mini-Suite” introduced the youngest members of Ballet Fantastique, and they all brought their talent and training to the Soreng stage.

Regina Urrutia as Red Riding Hood was sweet and very poised during

her solo. Moore was the great big bad wolf, but he ended up with a bouquet of flowers dropped by the frightened girl.

Children danced Mama, Papa and Baby Bear with great enthusiasm. Hakes danced and mimed Goldilocks with a light touch.

The “Fairy Doll Mini-Suite” showed off adults and children in exciting ways. The first part was based on choreography by the Kirov Ballet.

Moore, as the clown, falls in love with the Fairy Doll, danced by Hannah Bontrager. The lifts in their pas de deux were fabulous. The Fairy Doll spurns the Clown’s advances, and Alonzo is very sad at the end of their dance.

Sara Parker as the Fairy Godmother Doll was solid, but sweet. The kids who danced the mini dolls with flutes were charmingly innocent.

Act I ended with Maurice Ravel’s “Daphnis and Chloe.” The piece was commissioned by the Eugene Symphony and premiered last month.

Ashley and Hannah Bontrager, Hakes and Thieme were radiant in their flowing tunics of green and aqua. The choreography was wonderful and the presentation perfect. It was as if they had stepped right off a Greek vase.

This was my favorite piece of the afternoon, and I look forward to seeing it again. I spoke with two men near me at intermission. They concurred that this was a special dance, and it made their train trip from Seattle to the performance worth the time and energy.

P.I. Tchaikovsky’s “Waltz of the Flowers” opened Act II. Not often performed outside of the Christmas production of the “Nutcracker Suite,” it was well danced and familiar to all.

Moore, again the clown, introduced the next “Fairy Doll Mini-Suite.” What a strong presence he brings to the stage. I would love to see him

leap across the Silva stage in future.

“Paquita” came next. Described as a Spanish sparkle, with choreography by the Kirov Ballet, it did sparkle and flash.

Moore was elegant as he partnered Ashley Bontrager and Hakes. The four solo variations that followed were executed with style and excitement. Fabulous costumes were worn by all the company. Viva la España.

The “Doll Mini-Suite” finale followed. Naomi Todd’s Harlequin, for which she did the choreography, was inventive, well danced and fun.

The afternoon ended with an abrupt departure from classic ballet.

Thieme brought the concept to the company, and Henry Mancini’s “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” brought us back to the 1950s. Black tight dresses, long white gloves and the mambo brought echoes of 1950s musicals, smoky nightclubs and wailing horns.

Was that Gene Kelley in the wings?

Moore played the fickle lover with big city style. Classic ballet and jazz don’t always mix well, but this martini was shaken, not stirred, to just the right beat.

The program hints of more “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” next season. I look forward to it.

Gwen Curran of Eugene reviews dance for The Register-Guard.