

art notes

KEEPING THE BALLET TORCH BURNING

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Many little kids dream of becoming dancers, or, more specifically, ballerinas. I for one spent hours creating dance moves that resembled a flamingo more than a swan. But what for me would be a one-time performance is a tangible goal for the dancers at Ballet Fantastique.

The academy, which opened in 2000, was the first nonprofit professional dance training school and is the only chamber ballet company in Eugene. Executive director Hannah Bontrager is proud that Ballet Fantastique was the only Eugene ballet company invited to perform in the Umpqua Dance Festival in Roseburg at 7 pm on Friday, May 4. "Ballet Fantastique and other performing community dance groups hope to support high-caliber arts in rural communities like Roseburg," Bontrager says.

Bontrager choreographed the feature dances with contributions from Ballet Fantastique dancers in the professional dancer development program. "It is very rare for young professional dancers to have the opportunity to choreograph part of a professional dance piece they're performing, so this is a big deal," says Bontrager.

The company dancers will be performing two pieces at the festival. One part is a more contemporary pointe piece. The second part of the performance is a solo series, "Spanish Inspiration," which includes excerpts from *Don Quixote*.

Because of a commitment to keep ballet alive for young people in the Northwest, Ballet Fantastique is also working with two local elementary schools. Teachers at Harris and Moffitt elementary schools and Ballet Fantastique are creating a program exploring academic subjects through the art of dance.

According to Bontrager, "Children don't learn as much when they just see something in front of them as they do when they get in and take a closer look." This nontraditional classroom approach provides students with the opportunity to draw connections between various subjects and build sophisticated and creative learning styles. "Instead of reading about a tornado, kids dance a tornado," Bontrager says.

And she'd like to expand the program to other schools; those interested can contact her at hbontrager@balletfantastique.org or 342-4611.— *Deanna Uutela*



Hannah Bontrager
Photo: Jared Mills

