

# BALLET *ballet like you've never seen it before.* FANTASTIQUE

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## **Ballet Fantastique named newest Hult Center Resident Company**

It's official: Ballet Fantastique is enthusiastically joining the talented ranks of the Eugene Symphony, the Oregon Bach Festival, Eugene Ballet Company, Eugene Opera, Eugene Concert Choir, and The Shedd Institute as the Hult Center's newest Resident Company—and the first new Resident Company at the Hult in over a decade.

Ballet Fantastique is led by its founding mother-daughter team, Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager and Executive Director Hannah Bontrager. Donna and Hannah are also the driving artistic force behind the company's critically-acclaimed all-original repertoire: as the company's Choreographer-Producers, they conceptualize and choreograph each of Ballet Fantastique's new contemporary ballet premieres. Most US ballet companies produce an average of one new ballet per year; under the Bontragers' leadership, Ballet Fantastique creates and produces *exclusively* all original work (3-5 premieres per year). Recent Ballet Fantastique full-length original contemporary narrative ballets include: *Cinderella* as a 1960's rock opera, Jane Austin's *Pride & Prejudice* re-imagined in Paris in the Roaring 20's to a live jazz score, the first-ever authorized ballet version of Zorro®, and the biblical story of Esther retold as a "rock gospel ballet" with the award-winning UO Gospel Singers. Ballet Fantastique's innovative work is proving to fulfill a unique niche in the Hult Center, targeting newer, younger audiences for the performing arts: for example, 48% of 2013–2014 season subscribers were under the age of 35 (industry standard is just 17%), and for over 50% of its donors, Ballet Fantastique represents the first arts organization to which they've ever donated.

"We are proud, humbled, and profoundly honored to have received this show of our city's recognition for the importance of our artistic work and the true uniqueness of our artistic programs and voice," said Donna and Hannah in a joint statement.

Eugene's Cultural Services Director, Tomi Anderson, shared Ballet Fantastique's enthusiasm: "We at the Hult Center and the Cultural Services Division are so pleased to welcome Ballet Fantastique as our newest Resident Company. They're a deeply committed dance company with a rapidly growing audience and a solid vision for the future. BFan brings a whole new generation of dance fans and arts enthusiasts to the Hult Center—I couldn't be happier to welcome this new Resident Company."

Donna and her daughters, Hannah and Ashley, founded Ballet Fantastique in 2000 when they opened their first dance studio in downtown Eugene, a 1,000 square foot space on 10th and Oak. From its humble beginnings, when Ballet Fantastique produced its first performances amidst stored office furniture in Agate Auditorium and in local school gymnasiums and churches, Ballet Fantastique has become a lithe organization innovating dance performance, education, and outreach in the Northwest and beyond. In 2013–2014, the company produced nine performances of its all-original contemporary ballets at the Hult Center, most of them to sold-out crowds and standing ovations. Now comprised of an elite group of ten professional dancers from Oregon and around the world, Ballet Fantastique has partnered with over 150 cross-disciplinary artists in the past decade—including a Brazilian modern dance company, actors, digital and literary artists, poets, composers, the Portland Taiko drummers, and the LA-based Latin rock band Incendio, to name just a few. Ballet Fantastique quadrupled its square footage and dance education programs reach with the opening of its downtown City Center for Dance in 2010, and completed its first highly successful international tour in 2013 with a sold-out performance of its wild west ballet version of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* in San Benedetto, Italy, where they were the first US ballet

company ever to perform. Grants awarded to Ballet Fantastique further endorse that it has entered a new era of growth and success: awards in summer 2014 total over \$100,000, including an \$85,000 grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust to grow artistic operations infrastructure.

The Hult Center's Resident Companies roster was created to provide an exceptional variety of educational programs and to offer the best in Eugene-based performing arts. In return, Resident Companies receive the benefits of maintaining a predetermined number of performances at the Hult Center per season: priority scheduling privileges, hall rental discounts, and the ability to apply for funding from the Hult and Silva endowments for operating and performance support. The requirements for achieving and maintaining Resident Company status are rigorous. Initial residency criteria include a multi-year demonstration (three years or more) of artistic excellence, stringent performance, production, and ticket sales benchmarks, as well as outreach work; thereafter, these same standards must be fulfilled each year to retain residency.

"We are thrilled that Ballet Fantastique has been recognized as the the Hult's newest Resident Company," says Board of Directors President and longtime fan Buzz Kawders. "I believe that Ballet Fantastique has worked since its inception to provide original, creative and artistically inspiring performances and collaborations. Our devoted artists have always committed themselves to the levels of excellence befitting a Resident Company, and it is a wonderful reward for all involved over the many years of work that this effort has now been recognized."

Ballet Fantastique will commemorate its "Season 5" of premiering original contemporary ballets at the Hult Center as well as its new Resident Company status with their first ever performance gala celebration at the Hult Center, **5x5** on Oct. 10. The gala includes a champagne toast in the Jacobs Gallery with Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager, a five-course dinner in Studio One, a one-night-only performance retrospective in the Soreng Theater (in five short acts, of course), and an after-party with live jazz and dessert in the Hult Center lobby.

The first contemporary ballet premiere of the company's 2014–2015 season: *QUEST* is the Charles Dickens holiday classic set in the 1940s in the US, *An American Christmas Carol* on Dec. 12–14 with Halie Loren singing Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra. For single and season tickets and more information, please visit [www.balletfantastique.org](http://www.balletfantastique.org).

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#### **2014-2015 Season Quick Facts:**

- **NEW: 5x5: 5th Anniversary Opening Night Gala (Hult Center):** Sat., Oct. 10, 2015. Toast: 5 pm; Dinner: 5:30 pm; Performance 7:30 pm; After-Party: 9 pm
- **PREMIERE: An American Christmas Carol (Hult Center):** Fri.–Sat., Dec. 12–13, 2014 at 7:30 pm; Sun. Dec. 14, 2014 at 2:30 pm (LIVE MUSIC: Halie Loren)
- **PREMIERE: The Odyssey: The Ballet (Hult Center):** Fri.–Sat., Feb. 27–28, 2015 at 7:30 pm; Sun. Mar. 1, 2015 at 2:30 pm
- **Cinderella: A Rock Opera Ballet set in 1964 (Hult Center):** Fri.–Sat., May 8–9, 2015 at 7:30 pm; Sun. May 10, 2015 at 2:30 pm (LIVE MUSIC: Shelley & Cal and the Agents of Unity Band)
- **Season tickets and single tickets on sale now:** Hult Center Box Office; One Eugene Center, Eugene, OR 97401; 541-682-5000; [www.balletfantastique.org](http://www.balletfantastique.org). Discounts for students/youth, seniors, and groups of 6+. Lobby Box Office Hours: T-F 12-5 pm, Sat. 11 am-3 pm