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Ballet Fantastique Brings *String Theory* to the Hult Center: A New Performance Inspired by Art and Science

Ballet Fantastique's 2010-2011 season opens November 20th and 21st at the Soreng Theater of Eugene's Hult Center with *String Theory*, a mixed-repertory concert showcasing the sophistication and versatility of the chamber company's dancers in works set to a range of music, including live string quintet, guitar, piano, violin, and saxophone.

"*String Theory* shows off the best of Ballet Fantastique. It's about pushing the range of our creativity, sharing the range of our taste in music, testing the boundaries of what can make classical ballet newly intriguing, insightfully relevant, and just plain good entertainment," said Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager of the original concept.

String Theory exhibits the personalities and stylistic flexibility of Ballet Fantastique in a series of string pieces, new and beloved. Musicians join the dancers on stage for the second half of the concert, including live piano, cello, and saxophone for Northwest composer Jeremy DeKyle Schropp's sensuous, nuanced Bulgarian dance titled *Bulgarska Tantsova Suita*.

"The choreography for *Bulgarska Tantsova* is extremely challenging. It is a very technical dance that highlights our dedication for excellence and perfection. It challenges me to really push myself," said dancer Leanne Mizzoni.

String Theory also includes a tart, tongue-in-cheek folk dance set to traditional Irish and Celtic folk ballads; three haunting Gypsy solos set to music from *The Red Violin*, with Eugene violinist Matthew Fuller on solo violin; Luigi Boccherini's warm and resonant "Musica Notturna del Strade di Madrid"; darkly flirtatious Niccolò Paganini for guitar and violin; and even an orchestral version of Metallica's powerful "Orion," with exquisite art shots of the constellation subtly lighting the background behind the dancers.

As suggested by the concert's title, the program also includes a work inspired by the scientific field of string theory and quantum mechanics. Set to music by the Canadian electronic composer Aaron Funk/Venetian

Snares, the playful and unexpected soundtrack sets the stage for a dance piece that explores how the electrons and quarks within an atom may actually be 1-dimensional oscillating lines (“strings”).

“It’s actually not such a stretch to imagine,” says Executive Director and dancer Hannah Bontrager, who looks forward to sharing the diverse program with Eugene audiences. “Dancers as elegant strings of energy? We thought, we can do this!”

New company dancer Krislyn Wessel, who danced most recently with Columbia City Ballet in South Carolina, says of the performance: “It is not just a typical classical ballet performance. It is a little edgy and a whole lot of fun. I think people who have the mindset that they don’t like ballet might be surprised!”

Ballet Fantastique worked to choose musical pieces—all featuring strings, of course—that aren’t obvious or expected. Composer Schropp and violinist Fuller have both offered guidance in this effort.

Says Hannah Bontrager, “I have to admit that I’m listening to the music from this show 24/7, even when we’re not in rehearsal or choreographing. It’s so beautiful, and it just resonates!”

Like many of the multi-faceted concerts performed by Ballet Fantastique, *String Theory* features a host of guest appearances and cross-medium collaboration. For this event, the partnership extends to Irkutsk, Russia, Eugene’s Russian Sister City. With the assistance of Sister Cities International, Ballet Fantastique proudly welcomes guest dancers Maria Valerievna Strelchenko and Yuriy Alexandrovich and renowned choreographer Lyudmila Tsvetkova, whose talents will be present on-stage. Tsvetkova will be choreographing to the Paganini works and to a piece by George Frideric Handel. The rest of the program’s choreography is by Donna and Hannah Bontrager.

“We’ve sent several of the pieces of music to Russia and Lyudmila will be ‘setting’ the pieces on Ballet Fantastique dancers, and we’re choreographing work that we will in turn integrate Maria and Yuriy into. It’s been a cross-continental effort united by this gorgeous music, and we can’t wait to share the final concert,” said Hannah Bontrager.

There will be a reception to celebrate and welcome Ballet Fantastique’s Russian guests following the November performances. Details can be found at www.balletfantastique.org.

Join Ballet Fantastique and guests Saturday November 20th at 7:30pm and Sunday, November 21st at 2:30pm for *String Theory*- a full, vibrant, and wonderfully memorable fall concert, bringing together stunning artists of music and dance. Prices begin at \$27 with significant discounts for students, youth, seniors, groups, and young professionals available, beginning at \$14. Tickets can be purchased through the Hult Center Box Office at www.hultcenter.org or (541) 682-5000.

For further information about Ballet Fantastique and their *String Theory* performance, please visit the Ballet Fantastique website at www.balletfantastique.org or call the studio (541) 342-4611. Executive Director Hannah Bontrager may be reached directly for comment at (541) 206-8977 or balletfantastique@gmail.com (not for publication, please).

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