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Diverse styles mingle beautifully at the Hult

By Janet Descutner

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Saturday night at the Hult Center, a well-attended performance by Ballet Fantastique of Eugene and Traduza Dance Company of Roseburg made for an evening of fine dancing.

A generous grant to Ballet Fantastique from the Lane Arts Council, with support from the city of Eugene's Cultural Services Division, helped bring to life the directors' vision: to bring together two distinct styles of dance - Spanish and Latin-inspired - with the distinct genres of classical ballet and modern dance.

Director Donna Marisa Bontrager (Eugene) and choreographer/director Valeria Ball (Roseburg) subtitled their program "An Intriguing, Passionate Mosaic." While not all of the dances fulfilled that promise entirely, the dancing was solid and the music varied.

Traduza opened with Ball's "Snapshot." Brazilian percussion, a stark set of white boxes and the costumes - black halter tops and shorts on the trio of dancers - set the tone.

Ball performed with Katie Brown and Kaila Fromdhal. She described her intent: "Inspired by a photo shoot, we explore the geometry of the human body." The loose relationship set an atmosphere of disconnection.

Ballet Fantastique presented "Romanza." Choreographed by Executive Director Hannah Bontrager, her solo for Katherine Russell was described as "a meditation on the relationship between musician and dancer."

Guitarist Dave Sherry set the mood. Russell, in a Spanish costume, danced on pointe to the meditative sound. Flower in hand, she seemed to be in a dream, quietly demonstrating her skill.

Fantastique presented a suite of dances from Marius Petipa's "Don Quixote." The Waltz and the Variations were choreographed in part by Donna Marisa Bontrager. Each was performed brightly. A sextet on pointe featured Ashley Bontrager and Allison Thomas with Julia Hakes, Shellsea Bowen Kat Russell and Hannah Bontrager, strong and secure in their footwork.

Lexi Smith, a student company member with outstanding skills and sprightly yet mature presence, danced "Variations." Her arabesques were beautifully arched and lifted.

Hannah Bontrager finished the suite with "Kitri's Variations," leaping like a feather on pointe, ending with 18 sparkling pirouettes.

"Verana Porteno," a tango improvisation set by dancers Andrew McCollough and Jenna Rohrbacher, lacked underlying smolder.

"Dream Series" presented more Petipa. Akemi Kunibe showed early promise and quiet control in "Allegretto." In "Amour," Hannah Bontrager sustained pirouettes on pointe beautifully.

Bontrager and Allison Thomas, choreographers of "Brazil," were inspired by a Brazilian summer. The dance gained sweetness from five little student performers, but had a weak choreographic foundation.

Traduza's "Clang of Iron," by Ball, featured the drumming of Bolao and Virginia Rodrigues. Dancers Ball, K. Brown and Fromdhal were joined by Barra Brown, Hannah Downs, Jane Marshal and Justine Riva. Colin Hurowitz, Shawn Gorman and Peter Call provided percussion.

The theme was African slaves in Brazilian ownership, and paid tribute to their suffering. With such a theme, it's ironic that only one dancer was male. However, the women were powerful and expressive. The choreography was effective, and its success was enhanced by Phil Wyatt's projections, creating a poetic, mural-like effect.

In Act Two, "Sevillanas," by Ashley and Hannah Bontrager and Nicola Thieme, emphasized Spanish style, alluding to flamenco rhythm and its serious performance style.

Traduza's "Amazon Awakening" included the drummers again. Storyless, it is about atmosphere, created by both drummers and dancer action, energetic and crisp. The dance was interesting visually and in time. Four panels of nature were a glowing backdrop. The modern dance technique and body language were excellent.

"La Soledad" followed, a sextet to Chopin and Pink Martini, reminiscent of the 19th century "Pas de Quatre," with two additional performers. Traduza's "Te Quiero" brought a more contemporary look to the program, combining modern, jazz, adagio, tango and bassa nova. Katherine Russell performed a second solo, "Adelita."

The evening closed with excerpts from "Don Quixote," but the dancers seemed too tired to crank up the energy level. What came before was impressive and spectacular. I hope such a union of artists can come again to the Hult.

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