



BALLET FANTASTIQUE

For Immediate Release: Nov. 8, 2022



Contact Information:

Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager, Ballet Fantastique Choreographer-Producers
Mobile phone/direct email (not for publication): 541-206-8977; hannah@balletfantastique.org

QUICK FACTS:

- **WHAT:** Ballet Fantastique THANKSGIVING WEEKEND in the Silva Concert Hall: [Babes in Toyland](#) with LIVE music by Swing Shift Orchestra playing vintage Big Band holiday favorites, including Duke Ellington's *Nutcracker*
- **CONCEPT + CHOREOGRAPHY:** All-original, by choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager
- **EUGENE PERFORMANCES (SILVA CONCERT HALL, HULT CENTER):**
Thanksgiving Weekend: Sat. Nov. 26, 7:30 pm; Sun. Nov. 27, 2:30 pm
- **TICKETS:** Tickets \$22-76 (students/youth \$15-65), with \$5 off regularly priced tickets for groups of 6+. On sale now through the Hult Center Box Office: 541-682-5000 or www.hultcenter.org

THANKSGIVING WEEKEND IN THE SILVA:

Ballet Fantastique's retro-glam original holiday ballet reimagines a lost holiday classic, set to Duke Ellington's jazz Nutcracker, played LIVE by Swing Shift Orchestra

In Ballet Fantastique's *Babes in Toyland* this Thanksgiving Weekend, Nov. 26–27 in the Hult Center's Silva Concert Hall, audiences can be the first to experience a completely new holiday tradition in Eugene.

"It's gutsy for a ballet company, anywhere in the world, to do a holiday ballet that's not *The Nutcracker*," says Hannah Bontrager, Co-Choreographer Producer. "But this is so BFan. We're bringing ballet out of the box, reimagining a lost classic with new dance theater and great live music. We love taking a holiday weekend and giving people a wonderful immersive new experience and celebration."

With their original jazz ballet *Babes in Toyland* (as featured in *Pointe Magazine*), Ballet Fantastique mother-daughter team and Choreographer-Producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager reimagine a lost holiday story with new choreography, classic jazz, and a retro-glam holiday aesthetic. Hot big band jazz—played live in Silva Concert Hall by the Swing Shift Jazz Orchestra and live guest vocalists—and splashy, genre-defying dance. The project is generously funded in part by a grant from the Nils and Jewel Hult Foundation. 2022 presenting support is from Dave Kammerer of Summit Funding. Ballet Fantastique 22-23 Season Live Music Sponsors: Philip & Sandra Piele.

“I wanted to do this story because it brings back memories from my childhood, growing up in the early 1960s. It’s an era I remember and relate to. I literally watched the ‘Mouseketeers’ every day after school,” says Ballet Fantastique Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager. “*Babes in Toyland* is a forgotten holiday classic, which gives me so much storytelling and choreographic freedom. The story is filled with joviality and lovable, familiar storybook characters.”

“This is what Ballet Fantastique is all about: All-original new ballet theater, live music, great storytelling,” adds Hannah Bontrager, Co-Choreographer Producer.

About the Story/Music

To create their original 75-minute original contemporary ballet, Donna and Hannah spin past renditions of the story (including Victor Herbert’s original 1903 operetta, the 1934 Laurel and Hardy film, the 1961 Disney film, and an old storybook brought in by two Academy of Ballet Fantastique young student dancers, who first suggested the idea!), as well as re-writing aspects of the tale to create their new ballet.

“In the process of creating Ballet Fantastique’s new works of dance theater, we choose composers that we feel will fit the story production that we want to do—in this case, Swing Shift Orchestra playing big band music, including Duke Ellington’s wonderful jazz *Nutcracker*,” says Donna. “So, the music, characters, and story feel accessibly familiar, but also refreshingly new.”

Donna, Hannah, and BFan librettist-historian Deborah Speer worked with Swing Shift Orchestra librarian Travis Wong to choose an original score of arrangements for *Babes in Toyland*. BFan’s custom score includes much of Ellington’s *Nutcracker* as well as Glenn Miller *Nutcracker* arrangements and big band renditions of traditional holiday favorites such as “White Christmas,” arranged especially for Ballet Fantastique’s original production by talented jazz arranger **Steve Sharp** (St. Louis). Under the baton of **Daniel Cathey III**, Swing Shift Orchestra’s 17 members will play this custom score live, including **woodwinds, trumpets, trombones, guitar; piano, bass, and drums/percussion**. The project also brings in a team of four singers, under *Babes in Toyland* vocal ensemble coordinator and singer **Laurie Hammond**.

Three international dancers will be featured in the 2022 Silva concerts. After Eugene performances, Ballet Fantastique’s company tours to Northern Idaho and Eastern Washington for invited performances of the project there.

Ballet Fantastique’s original *Babes in Toyland* libretto

In Rhyme I (Act I), it’s Christmastime in Candyland. Though very busy watching her garden grow, **Mary, Quite Contrary** (Ballet Fantastique’s Carolin Koepplin) **Tom, the Piper’s Son** (BFan’s Preston Andrew Patterson) are also preparing for their upcoming nuptials. Their friends: **Little Bo Peep** (BFan’s Ashley Bontrager) **and Boy Blue** (Gustavo Ramirez—Colombia), **Jack** (guest artist Lester Gonzalez—Cuba) **and Jill**—(BFan’s Jenavieve Hernandez), and **Little Red**

Riding Hood (BFan's Isabelle Bloodgood) and **the Wolf** (guest artist Joshua Webb—England). Enter villainous **Barnaby Barnacle, Lord of Licorice and Landlord of Candyland** (guest artist Kevin Murdock-Waters—Austin), who not only wants to ruin Christmas for everyone, but also plans to marry Mary to steal her hard-won agricultural fortune! Barnaby Barnacle plots the kidnapping of Tom. Plans foiled at the Chocolate Swamp, Tom away does run. One catastrophe thus averted, Tom and Mary fall asleep in the Candycane Forest as the snowflakes start to fall and the Gumdrops (BFan's **Ana Brooks, Nicole Brown, Brooke Geoffrey-Bowler, and Madeline Kiesel**) swirl.

In Rhyme II (Act II), we find ourselves in Toyland on the morning of Christmas Eve, as Tom and Mary wake up to meet the **Toymakers** (Isabelle Bloodgood, Joshua Webb). Tom and Mary work together to fix the broken Toy Machine in time to save the Toys: The **Jack-in-the-Box and the Mechanical Dolls, Toy Soldiers** (Lead Lieutenant Gustavo Ramirez), **Princess Lollipop** (Ashley Bontrager), and **Cowboys** (Lester Gonzalez, Isabelle Bloodgood), and the **Gingerbread Kids** (student dancers from The Academy of Ballet Fantastique)! A fantastic Toyshop battle with Barnaby and his sidekicks ensues. Tom & Mary fix the Toy Machine, the Toys save Toyland, Barnaby is turned into a tiny teddy bear. Christmas Morning can come!

Original project designs

“To create an original ballet, Ballet Fantastique's creative team does a lot of things all at the same time! At the same time as we are writing our libretto, we are deciding on the characters and the narrative arc of each scene,” says Hannah on the creative process. “Once we've crafted our story and have decided who's on stage, we work with our creative team to hand-pick songs (usually about 14-20 pieces of music) that will help tell each part of the story. We're also simultaneously working on scenic and costume design plans and choreographing with our team of 15 Ballet Fantastique professional dancers.”



ABOVE: Original backdrop design for Ballet Fantastique's *Babes in Toyland*, by artists Kelle DeForrest and Erin Ferrell.

Ballet Fantastique's *Babes in Toyland* world premiere project brings together a formidable team of artists: Ballet Fantastique Choreographer-Producers Donna and Hannah Bontrager are joined by international costume designer Allison Ditson (Thailand, Portland), Primadonna Tutus (LA), headpiece designers Mitra Gruwell (Eugene) and Laura Boyle (Brimfield, MA), set designer Kelle DeForrest (Disney Imagineering), and Ballet Fantastique's resident librettist-historians and creative team, Deborah and Genevieve Speer (Eugene). A dramatic new custom backdrop is being painted for Ballet Fantastique's 2022

Babes in Toyland specific to the Silva Concert Hall stage dimensions (30' high x 60' wide) at a workshop in Georgia, featuring art created by artists Erin Ferrell (Macon, GA), and Kelle DeForrest.

Donna's artistic color palette is lots of red, lavender, mossy green, gold. "I love the idea of doing a story that has this soft nostalgia. I want to bring back the feel of glamorous 50 and 60s Hollywood, with its bright, lavish, uptight fashion and technicolor." Sets are whimsical, a nod to a 1950's Candyland board game. "And our jovial characters also need completely over-the-top sets and props to help tell the story: Twelve children come out of a giant shoe, Barnaby Barnacle needs his crooked house where he can make his dreadful plans," she adds.

"This performance is a magical new spectacle, and we can't wait to share it with our community," says Hannah Bontrager.

Tickets are available in person at the Hult Center or online at www.balletfantastique.org.

###

For high-resolution images of the production, please email hannah@balletfantastique.org