

PERFORMING ARTS FALL PREVIEW

Tigers, nutcrackers and Pink Martini, oh my!

The Eugene Ballet Company continues its run of innovative, collaborative works

BY ALEX CIPOLLE  
For The Register-Guard

Great art often requires great collaborations. This season, the Eugene Ballet Company has a slew of interesting and innovative partnerships.

It begins with a return production Oct. 6 and 8 of “Mowgli: The Jungle Book Ballet,” a contemporary spin on Rudyard Kipling’s 1894 book, a collection of anthropomorphic allegories set in the Indian jungle. Eugene Ballet presented it as a world premiere in 2012 at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts.

The ballet also will take the show on the road to Washington and Idaho, no easy feat considering the cargo will include more than 70 costumes, 50 masks and puppets of all shapes and sizes. The ballet’s creative team — with Jonna Hayden on costume design, Lynn Bowers doing mask design and Kelly Baum on lighting — paired up with Bill Burbach’s Acme Scene Shop in Portland.

“Many of these challenges involved working with new materials to keep the masks and puppets as light and flexible as possible and extended shopping trips to find the right fabrics to create a shimmering ballet full of the exotic beauty of India,” says Toni Pimble, EBC resident choreographer. That’s not even including the set.

“The set design is a non-literal representation of the jungle with strong art influences from Austrian visual art-



Eugene Ballet Company

The Eugene Ballet Company’s “Mowgli: The Jungle Book Ballet” will be performed at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts on Oct. 6 and 8.

EUGENE BALLET COMPANY

Where: Hult Center for the Performing Arts, Seventh Avenue and Willamette Street

Office: 1590 Willamette St.

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Tickets: 541-682-5000, eugeneballet.org, hultcenter.org

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TONI PIMBLE

RESIDENT CHOREOGRAPHER, EUGENE BALLET COMPANY

two large puppets: Shere Khan, a Bengal tiger, and Kaa, the Python.”

Following “Mowgli,” the Eugene Ballet will host the MOMIX dance company and its Southwestern-inspired performance, “Opus Cactus,” on Halloween night at the Hult Center.

Come December, Eugene Ballet brings back its

perennial holiday classic, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s “The Nutcracker,” Dec. 22-24, accompanied by musical partner of five years, Orchestra NEXT. More collaborations are slated for February with the Pink Martini performance, a reprisal from 2006.

“We have been looking forward to performing with them again for

10 years now,” Pimble says.

The production will feature the music, of course, of Pink Martini, as well as company dancer Suzanne Haag, modern dance teacher Sarah Elbert and an opening ballet from guest choreographer Val Caniparoli, who Pimble describes as one of America’s top choreographers.

And, perhaps saving the best for last, the Eugene Ballet will close its 2017-18 season with the world premiere of “Peer Gynt,” based on the play by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen.

“It is a play about a prodigal son, a feckless young man who travels the world experiencing many adventures, but ultimately returning to his homeland and the woman who remained true to him throughout the years,” Pimble says. “EBC received a grant from the Hult Endowment to work with Portland-based video engineer, Jessey Zepeda, and local visual artist, Satoko Motouji, to create fluid stage sets both projected and video.”

Heads will roll during Ballet Fantastique’s season opener

The company will be going “Renegade” with shows meant to break all the rules

BY ALEX CIPOLLE  
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For nearly 200 years, Washington Irving’s short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” has been read to children as summer yields to autumn and the nights grow darker. It’s an American classic with its New England setting nestled into the fall foliage of the Hudson River Valley, its charmingly peculiar and flawed protagonist — the schoolmaster Ichabod Crane — and the perfect Halloween villain — a headless horseman wielding a flaming pumpkin.

The autumn tale has been made into a cartoon, a feature film, a television series and, now, a ballet with Ballet Fantastique’s production on Oct. 27-29.

“This project is perfect for Halloween weekend: It’s about superstition, imagination,” says Donna Bontrager, artistic director of Ballet Fantastique. “The people of Sleepy Hollow are quirky and tangible — they’re real people with superstitions, drama. They love to dance, they love a story. This project — one of the earliest pieces of American fiction — takes our audience back in time to a part of our heritage. Back then, if you wanted to talk to someone, you had to sit down, face to face.”

The townspeople of Sleepy Hollow also like to party. In fact, one of the main scenes takes place at a harvest celebration at the homestead of the wealthiest family in the area — the Van Tassels.

“We have a lot of parties in this show,” Bontrager says.

The choreography



Ballet Fantastique

Ballet Fantastique will perform “ZORRO: The Ballet” March 2-4.

BALLET FANTASTIQUE

Where: Hult Center for the Performing Arts, Seventh Avenue and Willamette Street

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Tickets: 541-682-5000, hultcenter.com

draws inspiration from the sometimes raucous, always folksy tale, while giving it a new spin as well.

“We’re drawing on folk and character dance, but giving these influences a contemporary, sensuous edge,” she says. “There’s a range of style from quaint-yet-sophisticated colonial-inspired movement for the party celebration scenes, to sensuous movement to hypnotic, rhythmic pieces of music. Some of the music has driving, compelling — almost tribal — rhythm, some of the music is haunting, some of the melody lines feel almost Native American in heritage.”

Ballet Fantastique will collaborate with musicians Eliot Grasso, an internationally renowned uilleann piper and scholar, and Gerry Rempel, guitarist and resident composer for the ballet company.

“Both Gerry and El-

iot have their own styles as artists: Eliot can play ancient music that goes back in time, like what you would hear at a frolic in colonial days,” Bontrager says. “Meanwhile, Gerry can play (Niccolò) Paganini on electric guitar. There are also new pieces in our score that have been created just for this contemporary ballet premiere.”

“Sleepy Hollow” will open Ballet Fantastique’s 2017-18 season, a season that the company has deemed “Renegade.”

“Each of Ballet Fantastique’s concert projects breaks rules, from a jazz version of Charles Dickens to the first ever authorized ballet version of ‘ZORRO’ and our new, steampunk electro-swing ‘Alice in Wonderland,’” executive director Hannah Bontrager said. “It’s Ballet Fantastique’s hallmark: We’re ‘renegade ballet.’”



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