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BALLET FANTASTIQUE

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

QUICK FACTS:

- **WHAT:** Ballet Fantastique's original dance theater storybook unfolds, *Beauty & the Beast*, with international chamber music sensation **Trio Voronezh, LIVE on stage**
- **CONCEPT + CHOREOGRAPHY:** Ballet Fantastique explores the Russian folk roots of the classic *Beauty & the Beast* fairy tale through all-original choreography fusing Russian folk and popular dance, as well as Russian classical ballet and Ballets Russes, created by choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager
- **CONCERTS:** Fri., Mar 4, 7:30 pm, Sat., Mar 5, 7:30 pm, Sun., Mar 6, 2:30 pm. All shows in the Soreng Theater, Hult Center. Tickets \$22-72 (students/youth \$15-65), with \$5 off regularly priced tickets for groups of 6+ and 10% off discounts for Seniors. On sale now through the Hult Box Office: balletfantastique.org/beauty or 541-682-5000
- **Every live theater ticket includes a complimentary livestream link!**

Beauty & the Beast—as a gothic fairytale ballet spoof

Ballet Fantastique (affectionately known as “BFan” by its fans) presents its next ballet comedy, the Russian folk version of *Beauty & the Beast*, Mar 4–6 at the Hult. BFan Choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager's original, 75-minute work is a collaboration with the internationally renowned Russian musical group Trio Voronezh, known for their “zany” re-arrangements of classical music, with a Russian twist.

“I absolutely LOVE this music,” says Donna Marisa Bontrager, Ballet Fantastique's Artistic Director and lead choreographer for the project. “It's classically based, but utterly fresh, original, inimitable. The truth is that when we first started our work, we were going for this beautiful dark gothic telling—we're thinking of a traditional *Beauty & the Beast* ballet, with a moody castle, decadent



costumes...as a designer, I was really excited about that 'look.' But the Trio's music is just too fun! As soon as we started working in the studio, we knew that we were actually doing a bright, playful romantic comedy."

The Bontragers promptly changed direction for *Beauty & the Beast*—instead of "a gothic fairytale," the project became what they're calling "a gothic fairytale spoof."

The *Beauty and the Beast* story is iconic, and its themes—revenge and power, bravery and imagination—are universal. There is rich and powerful magic, an act of bravery to be performed, a payment to be made, a mystery to unravel. The Bontragers have chosen to tell the story through its folk lens: Sergey Aksakov's 1858 folk version of the fairytale, *The Scarlet Flower*, as opposed to its more well-known 1756 French predecessor, *La Belle et la Bete*. In so doing, they're exploring broader questions of how fairytales shape our culture and how our culture shapes our stories—and how our stories intersect and bring us together. And while they may do it with humor, Donna and Hannah's *Beauty & the Beast* also challenges traditional interpretations of representations of women in fairy tales: In the story, a brave young woman must journey a long way and endure terrible danger. It is not a fairy or magic that saves her and the Beast (as in many fairy tale traditions), but rather the heroine's own bravery, moral judgment, empathetic acumen, and fortitude.

"But still, this is a total 'RomCom,' and it's dance theater, BFan-style" says Hannah Bontrager. "We're playing with the story, we're playing with the music, and we're packing the choreography with as much detail as the Trio plays into their music. It's 200 steps and gestures per minute—it almost leaves you breathless."

The Bontragers have worked with international award-winning musicians Sergei Teleshev (banyan--button accordion), Valerie Petrukhin (double-bass balalaika), and Vladimir Volokhin (domra)—all traditional Russian folk instruments—to choose a score for their new libretto with music ranging from Russian folk tunes, to Tchaikovsky, to intricate Baroque Vivaldi for some of the scenes involving the "prissy sisters." A quirky Shostakovitch piece stars the father, whom Donna and Hannah are re-casting as a "maker of terrible perfumes." It is his journey to sell these perfumes at market—and decision to pluck a beautiful rose outside a mysterious castle—that sets off the story's action, and angers a terrible Beast. Trio Voronezh performs regularly on international stages, including with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Score & Scenes: Act I of BFan's all-original ballet opens with Prissy Sister 1 and Prissy Sister 2 (Emilia Montero, Jenavieve Hernandez) fighting over gifts, as their father (Adam Bloodgood) tries to keep the peace. Suitor/Russian soldier Ivan (Derek Lauer)—think the Russian version of Disney's Gaston—arrives to court Natasha/Beauty (Ashley Bontrager), and Natasha spurns his advances. Then, to the playful (and weird) sounds of Shostakovitch's "Polka from the Ballet Age of Gold," the girls' father mixes a perfume concoction so strong that it sends him straight to the floor. Thankfully, a whiff of another perfume he's made wakes him right back up again, and it's off to market to try to sell the magical brew. As he departs, he asks his daughters what gifts they'd like: The sisters ask for dresses and jewels, while Natasha asks only for a red rose. Scene 2 cuts to the castle, where the Beast/Prince Adam (Gustavo Ramirez) brooding with the wilting Spectre of the Rose (Isabelle Overstreet) in Brahms's "Hungarian Dance Suite No. 11" (a new arrangement by the Trio for Ballet Fantastique). Then, we see Natasha's father lost in the woods as he nears the gates of a dark castle, guarded by two enchanted gargoyles (Kate Arnson, Phoebe Green); after he plucks a rose, he meets more enchanted castle characters, including the Teapot, Madama Samovara (Carolyn Koepplin), the Flirty Butler (Derek Lauer), the Count (guest artist Lucas Labrador from Atlanta Ballet), and the Feather Duster (Esperanza Montero)—and the Beast, irate at the theft of his rose. When Natasha comes to look for her father, the Beast tells one of them that they must stay...and so the story continues, with a few twists and lots of fun.

BFan's artistic team took great pleasure in designing a 19th century Gothic-Romantic Russian aesthetic for this project. Notable artist collaborators with new work commissioned to realize Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager's design vision for the *Beauty & the Beast* project: Jonna Hayden (costumes), Allison Ditson (costumes), Adam Goldthwaite (maskmaker), Etain Wilday (gargoyle wings/headpieces), Mike Ricker (sets), and Genna and Deborah Speer (libretto/research support).

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