

Parisian drama, Eugene dancers

Ballet Fantastique's season opener brings Paris to the stage with the help of local talent

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Quaint outdoor cafes, starry evenings and chocolate-filled bon-bons eaten beneath the Eiffel Tower create the unmistakable ambiance of romantic Paris, France.

This Parisian setting fused with expressive dance sets the stage for Eugene's Ballet Fantastique's season premiere performance, *Visions d'Amour: 10 Ballets in Paris*. The production is composed of 10 short ballets ranging from two- to 30-minute acts. Each act showcases passionate Eugene talent, including University music and dance students, while tapping into the romance and elegance of French culture.

Ballet director Hannah Bontrager is a University alumna herself, and so is her mother, artistic director Donna Bontrager. Along with their staff, the Bontragers have been tirelessly working to incorporate local talent in their productions. They say *Visions d'Amour: 10 Ballets in Paris* will be a prime example of what the Northwest and specifically Eugene have to offer the stage. "This performance is truly a fusion of many artistic voices from Eugene and the University of Oregon," Hannah Bontrager said.

Ballet Fantastique was originally founded to give Oregon professionals an opportunity to hone their individual talents.

“Hannah and I started Ballet Fantastique’s chamber company in 2006 because we wanted to give dancers in this community an opportunity to perform at a professional level,” Donna Bontrager said. “We never dreamed it would work so well – that there would be so much interest from dancers in doing that – and from audiences enjoying our concerts.”

Eugene dancers, musicians, choreographers and members of the stage crew will all use their home-grown expertise to exhibit the elegance of Parisian culture through artistic expression. University talent includes Jeremy Schropp, a Eugene-based composer who is finishing his doctorate from the University, and the University orchestra, which draws musicians from the Oregon Mozart Players.

The live musicians and dramatic dance team up to tell stories of jealousy, infatuation and forbidden love. Company dancer Leanne Mizzoni explains that the show’s intimate themes will intrigue and engage the audience.

“There is a lot of acting on our stage; we are not just dancing but playing with the audience too,” Mizzoni said. “We are making them part of the story; there really isn’t a dull moment in the show.”

The show will display vibrant costumes and love-based themes ranging from scandalous Moulin Rouge scenes to more elegant representations of romance. The opening acts include realistic characters in flirtatious attire who are supposed to represent everyday relationship dilemmas. University student and company dancer Amelia Unsicker acts and dances the role of a love-struck girlfriend named Lola, whose boyfriend’s secretive flirtatious behavior has her dancing in anger and distress.

“People will be able to relate to these situations in their own lives or situations,” Unsicker said.

Perhaps the most anticipated act of the performance is “Night at the Café Terrace,” which displays the harmonic melody of the University’s orchestra. The orchestra, live on stage, functions as a character of the Café Terrace scene as it acts as the street band alongside the Parisian café.

Donna Bontrager is confident the orchestra’s on-stage presence, a unique element for any ballet, will provide the audience with a visual treat.

“First of all, when you have live music, even in a pit, it really enhances the dynamic – it’s so much more alive,” she said. “We’re doing something even more than just putting the orchestra on stage. We’ve choreographed around them, and we had our first rehearsal with them last week and it was just amazing. There’s a lot of artistic energy, and you feel it when you watch.”

The scene’s set is ornamented with painter Rob Adams’ “Night at the Café Terrace” painting, a commissioned and modern interpretation of Van Gogh’s Café de Nuit.

With the combination of music, dance and foreign culture, Hannah Bontrager is confident that 10 Ballets in Paris will appeal to anyone and everyone who attends.

“There is so much diversity in our performance; it will be absolutely mesmerizing. We have a unique fusion of dancers and musicians coming together to make something really fun and magical.”

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