

# Winter Bravo! 2011

*Eugene weekly's* guide to the performing arts

## Room to Move

**Eugene Ballet, Ballet Fantastique enjoying rehearsal spaces**

by Suzi Steffen

Ballet requires small, controlled muscle movements along with long runs across large spaces, and it's not easy to find space for the hours of practice and rehearsal dancers need. The Brazilian hardwood floors have to be just right so dancers don't get (more than normally)



Ballet Fantastique's *Bossa Brasil* Jan. 29

injured; the rehearsal space needs mirrors, usually a piano, a sound system and barres.

But Eugene's lucky here as in other arts arenas: Both the large Eugene Ballet Company and the chamber ballet group Ballet Fantastique now have large, centrally located studios that invite the community to watch, listen and learn more about various forms of ballet and other dance.

The Eugene Ballet Company, a Hult Center resident company, moved into its space in the Midtown Arts building in 2006, and executive director Riley Grannan says that the experience has been splendid. "We have three large or five total studios," he says, for two of the larger spaces can be divided into smaller spaces for the dance classes that often occupy the building from dawn to dusk (and beyond). Each space has its own sound system, which Grannan says means that artistic director and choreographer Toni Pimble can run performance rehearsals from her iPad. "Dancers used to be able to at least slack off for a couple of seconds while you rewind things, but not anymore," Grannan says, laughing.

Sometimes, other dance companies, including Aleto Alessi's DanceAbility and Phenomenon Hip Hop Dance Company, use the space for classes or rehearsals. "Hip hop can actually electrocharge you," says Grannan, whose office is upstairs in the open-design building. And the building's designed to be attractive from the street. "We purposefully opened it up enough that a kid going by can see that things are going on in here," Grannan says. "At the same time, it's secure, and we've made it pretty safe."

A few blocks down, in the old Tiffany's drugstore in the Overpark, Ballet Fantastique opened its City Center for Dance last fall. Using a Meyer Memorial Trust grant to spur donations from the community, the chamber ballet group refinished the space with a ton of volunteer hours, in-kind donations and hard work. "The thing I'm most proud of is laying the Brazilian cherry hardwood floor," says executive director Hannah Bontrager. "That, and the drywall."

The new space means that Ballet Fantastique has two studios (the other, smaller one is also in the Overpark but across 10th), and the larger one, with a loft for administrative offices and board meeting space, garners a lot of attention from passersby. "People are stopping to watch all day long," Bontrager says. "We have three new company dancers this year, so there's no way we could have fit in the other studio."

And after all of the volunteer hours – "The most people we had at any one time was 17 people, including dancers, friends we just co-opted and my father-in-law," Bontrager says – Ballet Fantastique has also been able to expand its classes and open up pre-performance rehearsals for an affordable Open Barre series, with dance punctuated by local wine, beer and food for the standing-room only crowds.

Bontrager says, "We're all just smiling every day, having this chance."