

Dance Review

Whirlwind tour of Brazil proves to be exhilarating

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For The Register-Guard

Published: **Wednesday, Feb 2, 2011 05:02AM**

Flying down to Rio with Ballet Fantastique's performance of "bossa/brasil" was a welcome diversion during this Oregon winter. Warmer temperatures, brighter colors, stunning music and beautiful people beckoned to the fully booked "tour" that landed Saturday evening at the Hult's Soreng Theater.

With the program serving as tour guide for the evening, Krista Carpenter, a United Airlines flight attendant, began our getaway by welcoming us to Rio de Janeiro as the plane's wheels touched down.

Ballet Fantastique always uses guest artists, musicians and original music as part of its presentations, which is a unique dimension of this local company. It broadens its scope and educates the audience.

Amelia Unsicker, as the "Girl From Ipanema," and Ashley and Hannah Bontrager, as the Sunshine Girls, definitely set a hot beach mood in the opening piece, as did the familiar music by Stan Getz and Joao Gilberto. Adam Haago provided some humor as the Surfer Dude.

Local choreographer-dancer Librado Biasco added some "street cred" with his hip-hop/break-dance to music by Gotan Project.

According to our tour guide/program, the second stop was a nightclub featuring a fabulous Northwest singer, Jessie Marquez, with an equally fabulous trio including the fast fingers of Greg Goebel on piano, Mark Shneider on bass and Rafael Trujillo on drums.

Marquez's sultry voice told stories to music by Antonio Carlos Jobim and Enrique Cardenas. Guest ballroom dancers Edward Staver and Chrystee Hauser lent another layer of romance with their Latin style.

After a brief Portuguese language lesson, we moved for Tour Stop 3 to the steamy Amazon jungle, filled with divergent and endangered species of birds. Emily McPherson played the premiere of Charles Gurke's "Fifty Years of Solitude" on the flute, while Amanda Coleman fluttered and jumped as a trapped bird might in a large cage.

Then Priscilla Dantas, a young, award-winning Brazilian concert pianist, played "Jongo No. 3 Suite Brasileira," a haunting piece by Lorenzo Fernandez. McPherson, an award-winning flutist, played beautifully on Astor Piazzolla's Tango Etude No. 4.

On to the huge city of Sao Paulo, where Ashley Bontrager, Hannah Bontrager and Leanne Missoni drew from the city's European roots for the fiery flamenco dance. Ole!

To the Pampas in southwest Brazil.

Hannah Bontrager, Mizsoni and Jordyn Richter thrilled us with their charisma and technique. They were joined by Elijah Labay, a member of the NW Dance Project in Portland.

At Carnival time in Salvador, set to the tango music of Piazzolla, Hannah Bontrager, Mizsoni, Richter, Unsicker and Krislyn Wessel were brilliant!

Ah, Sunday morning and back to Rio to music from Pink Martini. Thomas Newman as Him and Camilla Morgenstern as Her were charmingly innocent.

My favorite dance of the evening was the "Tango Forte." The six female dancers in matching red tutus filled the stage with difficult and quick ensemble work, along with precise fan and arm movements. Using the Afro percussion beat of Dublex Inc. was a stroke of genius, and the choreography was the most original of the evening.

Thank you to the choreographers, Donna and Hannah Bontrager. And the company's six female dancers make a true corps de ballet.

Ole! Ole! Ole!

Gwen Curran of Eugene reviews dance for The Register-Guard.