

1960s 'Cinderella' is a fun, rock 'n' roll ballet

BY GWEN CURRAN

For The Register-Guard

Ballet Fantastique, with a little help from its friends, rocked the roof off the Hult Center's Soreng Theatre Saturday night with its 1964 rock-opera ballet version of "Cinderella."

With music from the Supremes, the Chordettes and the Beatles, what's not to like? The Agents of Unity played and sang with skill and passion for the '60s era. These top notch musicians included Shelley and Cal James, Joe Weber, Rica Wright Weber, Tom Teutsch, Jim Reinking Jennifer Scurlock. The Jameses and Joe Weber and Callan Coleman arranged all the music. Rock on!

Fred Crafts of Radio Redux kept the show moving along with his clear and quick paced narration.

Donna and Hannah Bontrager designed the great '60s costumes and choreographed a delightful mix of classic ballet and '60s dances for the awesome company dancers.

The guest performers, Frederick Davis (Dance Theatre of Harlem) and Elijah Labay (Northwest Dance Project) elevated the performance level.

Davis, as Prince Charming, demonstrated excellent dance technique and acting skills throughout the evening. There were moments, though, when it might have been better for him to perform on a larger stage. His duet, with many lifts, with Fairy Godmother, portrayed by Leanne Mizzoni, was wonderful. Why no lifts with Cinderella?

The step sisters, Krislyn Wessel and Ashley Bontrager, showed off their comic talents, as did Amelia Unsicker as the Stepmother. These three set the comedic tone for the whole ballet. Hannah Bontrager, in a blonde wig, was hilarious as the Dancing Diva dance instructor.

Elijah Labay and Hannah Bontrager, as "Wild Things," a black leather motorcycle couple brought a dash of "bad" to the Prince's ball. Well choreographed (with some sparks of Twyla Tharp) and well danced, this was definitely an audience favorite.

Cinderella, danced by Alanna Fisher, seemed a tad stiff. Her technique is quite good, but the Cinderella sparkle of her ball costume did not translate to her body.

Much credit for the production's success must go to the talented and professional musicians. Besides arranging all the music, which was chosen by Donna and Hannah Bontrager, Shelley and Cal and the band played perfectly for "Cinderella."

The '60s is close to Hannah Bontrager's heart. She rode to school on the back of a motorcycle, screamed to the Beatles and went to her prom with a beehive hairdo. Her love of that decade showed in the music, the costumes and the choreography.

Some of the songs included "Big Girls Don't Cry" (Jersey Boys), "You Can't Hurry Love" (The Supremes), "Mashed Potato Time" (Dee Dee Sharp) and "Mr. Sandman" (The Chordettes). Anything ring familiar?

"Wild Thing" (The Troggs), "I Saw Her Standing There" (The Beatles), "Save the Last Dance for Me" (The Drifters), "My Boyfriend's Back" (The Angels), "Do You Love Me?" (Contours) and "Be My Baby" (The Ronettes) rounded out the evening.

Ballet Fantastique not only danced outside the box, it threw the box away. Who knew you could put the twist and the mashed potato into ballet en pointe?

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