

# BALLET FANTASTIQUE

CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER BALLET COMPANY

Ballet like you've never seen it before.

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## QUICK FACTS:

- WHAT: Ballet Fantastique's new contemporary ballet, *The Misadventures of Casanova*
- WHEN: Sat. Feb. 2, 7:30pm; Sun. Feb. 3, 2:30pm
- WHERE: Soreng Theater, Hult Center
- CHOREOGRAPHY: All-original, from choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager
- TICKETS: \$27, \$33 (discounts for students, youth, seniors, and groups of six or more). On sale now through the Hult Center Box Office: 541-682-5000 or [www.hultcenter.org](http://www.hultcenter.org). Advance ticket purchase highly recommended (BFan's last three shows sold out)

## Ballet Fantastique goes baroque

*"I will never admit that love is a trifle or a vanity...It is a kind of madness over which philosophy has no power at all."*

—Casanova, in his *Histoire de ma Vie*

It's a new aesthetic for Eugene's contemporary ballet company this Feb. 2–3 at the Hult Center: the decadence and intrigue of 18th century Venice in the age of *amour*. The stories—and women—twisting through Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontragers' new work for Ballet Fantastique, *The Misadventures of Casanova*, are drawn directly from the pages of *Histoire de ma Vie* ("History of my life"), 3,800 autobiographical pages written by the man Giacomo Girolamo Casanova de Seingalt. Embellished with elaborate costumes, eloquent music, and through the Bontragers' dramatic movement, Ballet Fantastique's seven dancers—alongside returning audience favorites Elijah Labay from Northwest Dance Project (as Casanova) and international circus artist Raymond Silos (as Catherine the Great's secretary, the conniving Ivan Perfilievich Yelagin)—will bring some of the most intriguing characters from the Casanova legend to life.

Born in Venice in 1725 to two actors, Giacomo Casanova wrote about what it was like to be alive in a revolutionary age filled with drama and deception, in the city that was then the culture and tourism capital (and most densely-populated) of Europe.

It was the age of Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and Diderot's *Les Bijoux Indiscrets*. Red-haired priest Antonio Vivaldi was pouring his passion into the creation of four hundred concerti. It was the city of Carnival, then the most protracted and wildly theatrical tradition in Europe: mask-wearing was mandatory, for an entire city, day and night, for a full five months of the year...an exotic practice that made many writers gasp.

And in this dramatic setting, Casanova was a Venetian who never needed to be told that life is a stage: "What was required of me was the skill to play my role and not to compromise myself. The thing...is to dazzle," he wrote. Dazzle he did: as legend has it, no woman could resist his charms. They dance their stories in *The Misadventures of Casanova's* two 30-minute acts.

### **The characters**

First, there is the priest's niece Angela Tosello (danced by Ashley Bontrager), one of Casanova's first loves; the eighteen-year-old Casanova would spend hours visiting Angela and her sisters Nanetta and Marta, who would embroider whilst he attempted to impress them with his tales. Of Angela, Casanova said, "I wooed her with all the charm I could muster...I prayed and even wept." Other characters in the Ballet Fantastique production include Lucia (Krislyn Wessel), the young woman who taunted Casanova when she brought him coffee every morning at his bedside during his visits to the country estate of the Countess of Montereale, and Paulina (Alanna Fisher), a beautiful noblewoman already betrothed to another. Weaving through the ballet is also the woman Casanova called the "love of his life," the Frenchwoman Henriette (Hannah Bontrager), an intellectual and writer.

"Because this is, after all, *The Misadventures of Casanova*," says Ballet Fantastique choreographer-producer Donna Marisa Bontrager, "we're not just showing Casanova in successful conquest. We've chosen female characters that challenged and sometimes even foiled him, that have nuance and power and complexity."

This man who was born a nobody became a frequent guest in the courts of his era's greatest society (Louis XIV, Voltaire, Rousseau, Catherine the Great, Mozart—among numerous famous actors and musicians). In the spirit of the age, Ballet Fantastique's production also playfully explores the possible identities of some of the women Casanova said he "could not name" on some of these adventures: Leanne Mizzoni dances the part of the great Italian mezza-soprano Faustina Bordoni, and Caitlin Christopher the part of a European royal whose name Casanova won't reveal, even to an audience three hundred years later.

"I'm really looking forward to dancing this part. Casanova was a fascinating historical figure and 18th century Venice is a fascinating setting—so because Ballet Fantastique always asks me to build nuance into my character and bring the style of the period into my movement, this is going to be a fun challenge," Elijah Labay on dancing the character of Casanova.

### **Music and choreography**

The Bontragers' contemporary interpretation of baroque movement is founded in their extensive historical research into social court dancing.

"Many of the movements will be intricate, posing quick footwork in juxtaposition with large sweeping gestures," says Donna Marisa Bontrager. The structure of the dances emphasizes the counterpoint of symmetry by breaking up of patterns and then transforming them back into symmetrical shapes."

"The ballet's movement has this very sexy tension between restraint and release," says Hannah Bontrager. "But the choreography is tasteful—our *Casanova* is still PG."

"True to Ballet Fantastique form, this is not a typical ballet," says dancer Leanne Mizzoni. "The movement is complicated and challenging. It's very, very, detailed, and Donna is being specific about every measure of the musicality she wants."

A few duels (with single rapier, of course), chases, and of course, a masquerade ball, all make their way to the stage through the Bontragers' choreography. Each scene uses music from the era, including Vivaldi's *La Folia* ("madness"), Concerto in D Minor for Two Violas da Gamba, Concerto in G Minor, and Concerto in A Minor for Four Harpsichords.

### **Quick facts**

*The Misadventures of Casanova* premieres at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts Feb. 2, with performances Sat. Feb. 2 at 7:30pm and Sun. Feb. 3 at 2:30pm. The company will continue its 2012-2013 VENTURE season with the May 4–5 production of *Pride & Prejudice: A Parisian Jazz Ballet* set in Paris in the roaring 20's with live jazz. The company will also become the first American dance company to perform in San Benedetto del Tronto, where they have been invited to perform their original production of *As You Like It: A Wild West Ballet* in July 2013. Ballet Fantastique's 2012-2013 season is the last of their three-year Hult Center Resident Company application process, and has included all-original repertoire for each production.

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