

## The Man, and Women, Behind the Mask

Ballet Fantastique produces and performs first-ever authorized ballet of Zorro

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*Caitlin Christopher in Zorro. Photo by Greg Burns.*

Zorro had some pretty good genes. On one side his father: Alejandro de la Vega, a soldier with ties to Spanish aristocracy. On the other his mother: Toypurnia, a powerful Tongva warrior who led her tribe into battle against the Spaniards. With parents from conflicting cultures, it's no wonder Zorro (real name Diego de la Vega) had an identity crisis, growing up to be the swashbuckling, masked crusader who leaves Z's in his wake.

It was this origin narrative in Isabel Allende's *Zorro: A Novel* that had Ballet Fantastique co-directors Donna and Hannah Bontrager asking, "Why not ballet?"

Zorro Productions Inc. was so impressed with Fantastique’s creative retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* in the roaring ’20s and *Cinderella* as a ’60s rock opera that they gave the dance company the green light to perform the first-ever ballet version of Zorro for the opening of the ballet’s 2013-14 season. In true Fantastique fashion, the show won’t be a regurgitation of the Disney series or an Antonio Banderas flick. “It’s not the adventures of Zorro, it’s the *making* of Zorro,” Hannah Bontrager says. With Allende’s novel — often credited as the prequel to the original story — as key inspiration, the mother-daughter team has created organic choreography, designed original costumes and handpicked professional live music for a unique exploration into the foundation of this classic legend.

The driving force of the show is Zorro’s duality. Rather than solely focus on his romantic conquests or his epic sword fights that lead to the defeat and humiliation of his bumbling villains, the show will travel to his mother’s tribe, his 16th birthday party and across the sea to Barcelona where he becomes the Spanish Clark Kent-meets-Robin Hood hero we know and love. To complement award-winning contemporary Portuguese ballet dancer Fàbio Simões as Zorro/Diego de la Vega and his father Alejandro, the company will feature its many female dancers as the women who shaped Zorro’s character. Along the way the audience will meet White Owl, the shaman that helps Diego find his totem (the fox or *el zorro*), Bernardo, his childhood best friend, the villains that cross his path and, of course, the women he woos.

In addition to the original choreography, Donna Bontrager has teamed up with local fashion designer Allison Ditson (of Allihala) to create bold period costumes. Performing with the dancers will be violin virtuoso Kim Angelis, as well as the Latin sounds of the L.A.-based Incendio Band. “They’re classically based, but they’re mixing it up and making something new, just like we do,” Hannah Bontrager says.

Creating things from scratch may seem challenging, but like Zorro, it’s what has helped Ballet Fantastique make their mark. “We’re really proud of thinking of new ways to tell these traditional stories,” Hannah Bontrager says. “And ballet is our vehicle for that.”

*Zorro: The Ballet runs Oct. 18-20 at the Hult.*

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