

BALLET *ballet like you've never seen it before.* FANTASTIQUE

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Cirque De La Lune Quick Facts:

- **DATES Portland** • Saturday, Oct. 3 at 7:30 pm, Lincoln Performance Hall, Portland
Eugene • Friday–Saturday, Oct. 9–10 at 7:30 pm, Sunday, Oct. 11 at 2:30 pm, Soreng Theater, Hult Center, Eugene
- **CONCEPT/CHOREOGRAPHY/PRODUCTION** Ballet Fantastique resident choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager
- **LIVE MUSIC** Troupe Carnivàle, Betty and the Boy, and Mood Area 52
- **GUEST CIRCUS ARTIST** International guest circus artist Raymond Silos (cyr wheel, silks, trapeze)
- **TICKETS** Single + season tickets on sale at the www.balletfantastique.org *Discounts: students, youth, and groups of 6+*
Portland (Tickets West): YYY or www.ticketwest.org • **Eugene** (Hult Box Office): 541-682-5000 or www.hultcenter.org

Ballet Fantastique’s all-original ballet about a 1930s Depression-era circus, with three live “folkestras”

Ballet Fantastique opens the 15–16 season with *Cirque de la Lune*, its all-original contemporary ballet set in the alternatively fantastical and gritty worlds of a traveling 1930s Depression-era circus. The production features Ballet Fantastique’s signature mix: bold new dance theater, all-original choreography, extraordinary guests (international circus artist Raymond Silos on cyr wheel, silks, and trapeze), and great taste in live music (“folkestras” Troupe Carnivàle, Betty and the Boy, and Mood Area 52).

Comprised of just 10 professional dancers from across the US, Ballet Fantastique has made a name for itself in these kinds of out-of-the-box contemporary story ballets: recent premieres by resident Choreographer-Producers Donna and Hannah Bontrager include *Cinderella* as a rock opera set in 1964, Jane Austen’s *Pride & Prejudice* set in Roaring 20’s Paris to live jazz, the biblical story of Esther as a “rock gospel ballet” with the UO Gospel Singers, and a Wild West spin on Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, performed most recently to sell-out crowds and standing ovations in San Benedetto, Italy. Ballet Fantastique has been heralded “a bold, cross-disciplinary dance company” (*Eugene Weekly*) “imaginative geniuses” (*Portland Monthly Magazine*), and “not your grandmother’s *Swan Lake*” (*Register-Guard*). Based in Eugene, Ballet Fantastique was recently named the first new Resident Company of the Hult Center for the Performing Arts in over a decade, and is known for attracting sell-out crowds and nontraditional audiences through this hybrid brand of accessible, all-new dance theater.

And in *Cirque de la Lune*, there’s more than one “BFan twist”: for one, the story is all-original, too.

“This is truly dance *theater*—and truly Ballet Fantastique at its best,” says Ballet Fantastique Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager. “This project is special to us because it represents this totally crazy, totally daring artistic endeavor for us... Not only did we decide to blur the lines of where ballet meets circus, but we’re also introducing these three live bands to each other, juxtaposing their original music with ballet and with each other for the first time. And we also wanted to see if we could write our own story—we wanted to see if we could do a performance about what happens *before* a performance.”

The show's title is a play on "Cirque du Soleil" ("circus of the moon" instead of "circus of the sun"), and reflects an overarching interest in "cirque" productions across the arts world (e.g., orchestras partnering with circus performers, circus ballets, etc.). Yet true to form, there's a play on the conceptual premise of a circus show. This isn't a circus show—it's a show about a circus.

"We wanted to really delve into the dynamics of the Depression era," says co-Choreographer-Producer Hannah Bontrager. "During this time when America is struggling, the circus holds this treasured place—drama, escape from everyday reality. Yet while people *needed* the escape, the glitter, the magic, circuses are also struggling to stay afloat. It's smoke and mirrors. So, while we wanted to imagine the flashy circus acts in our ballet (the 'rehearsals'), we also wanted to play with what the inner dramas of the performers might look like."

The Bontragers' storybook unfolds as Simone (Hannah Bontrager) is running away from home to Betty & the Boy's "The Waltz." She encounters Noemie, the gypsy fortune teller (Amanda Coleman) in "Seller of Dreams" by Troupe Carnivàle, then Ansel the Amazing (Raymond Silos) as the circus rises around them to "Furniture Migration" by Mood Area 52. Ansel encourages the increasingly daring Simone to audition for the Cirque de la Lune circus—and as the other performers pester Ringmaster Gaspard (Martino Sauter) for their long-overdue paychecks, Simone begs for a place in the night's performance (Mood Area 52's "Dance Like the Day Before You Die"). As the night's rehearsals continue, we meet the charming trickster Romeo (Anthony Rosario), diva Estrella (Leanne Mizzoni), and learn of a secret romance between Chiara, the lion tamer (Ashley Bontrager) and the rough Gaspard. Arielle (Summer Reed) longs for home and clown Bernard (Jim Ballard) pines for affection.

As is Ballet Fantastique's trademark, *Cirque de la Lune* choreography runs a gamut of styles, and is full of intricate detail and tricky musicality. "With the choreography, we're doing things that put it a little bit off. We'll dance a sequence of movement, and Donna will tell us that it looks too 'pretty,' or too 'expected,'" says company dancer Leanne Mizzoni, dancing Estrella. "It's fun and it's challenging to find this new style."

Cirque de la Lune's musical calendar includes an appropriately unruly mix of strings (including three standing basses), two drum kits, accordion, toy piano, mandolin, banjo, and percussion that will present more than one surprise for audience members. Each of the works on the program is a work of original music by the band performing it. In all, *Cirque's* music is as unexpected as it is hauntingly familiar—weaving together diverse stylistic influences from folk, bluegrass, neo-tango, Brechtian cabaret, and what one band calls a "unique blend of carnival-esque interpretations of alt-country."

"Their style fits perfectly with the music Donna and Hannah have chosen from each of us in the participating bands," says Jackie Cowsill of Troupe Carnivàle. "It combines elements of long-standing tradition with new, modern elements and ideas."

Along with the guest orchestras, *Cirque de la Lune* will also feature international circus artist Raymond Silos on cyr wheel, silks, and trapeze. Silos will appear in several pieces with the Ballet Fantastique dancers, as Donna and Hannah's choreography weaves together contemporary ballet movement with feats of aerial dance and other circus stunts. "I admire the edgy and fun style of Ballet Fantastique," says Silos. "It takes creativity to make a show original, but to get me excited to perform in it, brilliance. *Cirque de la Lune* promises just that."

"Being asked to be a part of the Ballet Fantastique's *Cirque de la Lune* performance is literally like, 'a dream collaboration' for us," says Betreena Jaeger, the "Betty" in *Betty and the Boy*, winners of *Eugene Weekly's* Best New Thing and recently returned from their UK tour. Michael Roderick from Mood Area 52 echoes the sentiment: "This is really interesting artistic collaboration. Ballet Fantastique creates dance that is daring and also has integrity of craft. We try to do the same."

Cirque de la Lune is appropriate for all ages; run time is 120 minutes, including a 20-minute intermission.

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