

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

**DONNA MARISA BONTRAGER  
+ HANNAH BONTRAGER**  
**DIRECTORS + CHOREOGRAPHER-PRODUCERS**  
www.balletfantastique.org | 541-342-4611  
960 oak | downtown eugene, or 97401  
get social with us: facebook | twitter | youtube | pinterest | flickr

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## Contact Information:

Donna Marisa Bontrager + Hannah Bontrager, Ballet Fantastique Choreographer-Producers  
Mobile phone/direct email (not for publication): 541-206-8977; [hbontrager@balletfantastique.org](mailto:hbontrager@balletfantastique.org)  
For high-resolution images of the production, please email [events@balletfantastique.org](mailto:events@balletfantastique.org)

## QUICK FACTS:

- **WHAT:** Ballet Fantastique's all-original *An American Christmas Carol*, with LIVE music from international chart-topping jazz singer Halie Loren and her jazz ensemble
- **CONCEPT + CHOREOGRAPHY:** All-original, by choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager
- **PERFORMANCES:** Fri. Dec. 11, 7:30 pm; Sat. Dec. 12, 7:30 pm; Sun. Dec. 13, 2:30 pm, Soreng Theater, Hult Center; tickets \$29-49 (students/youth \$18-24), with \$5 off regularly priced tickets for 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); Box Office hours T-F, 12-5pm; Sat. 11am-3pm
- **OUTREACH PERFORMANCE:** Thurs. Dec 10 at 9:30 am and 12:30 pm, Hult Center; tickets for school groups \$5–10 sliding scale. Available now through Ballet Fantastique Outreach Coordinator Andrew King: [operations@balletfantastique.org](mailto:operations@balletfantastique.org) or 541-342-4611.

**Charles Dickens meets Ella Fitzgerald (and Ballet meets Broadway)  
in Ballet Fantastique's all-original *An American Christmas Carol*, Dec. 11-12-13 at the Hult**

Choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager bring their *American Christmas Carol* to the Hult Center and Dec. 11-12-13. The all-original, 70-minute work is a collaboration between Ballet Fantastique and international chart-topping jazz singer Halie Loren—and is the latest in Ballet Fantastique's genre-defying hybrid dance-theater works, pairing theater and storytelling with original dance choreography set to live original arrangements of music that one doesn't traditionally associate with classical ballet.

"If you imagine what a ballet-Broadway version of *Christmas Carol* is, that's sort of how I would describe this project," says Ballet Fantastique Co-Choreographer-Producer Hannah Bontrager. "We look at how to best tell the story and make it fun for modern audiences. We immerse ourselves in the aesthetic and music of the era, we choose songs that tell the story—even tweaking lyrics if needed. We also re-imagine the perspective from which we tell the story."

In this case, Ballet Fantastique's unique new narrative perspective is a 40's Brooklyn gangster, "Smokey Joe" Marley, a period-inspired re-imagining of the character of Jacob Marley (Scrooge's long-dead slimy business partner) in Dickens's original. The Bontragers and their creative team (including Ballet Fantastique staff Librettist/Historian Genevieve Speer) birthed Joe out of the 1939 Cab Calloway song "The Ghost of Smokey Joe."

"When Genevieve brought us the Cab Calloway song, we knew it was perfect," says Ballet Fantastique Artistic Director and Choreographer-Producer Donna Marisa Bontrager. "This gravelly song about a really bad guy became our inspiration for a comedic character that drives the drama. And artistically, Smokey Joe's voice also lends our ballet a bit of grit and humor." Guest actor-singer and regular Ballet Fantastique guest artist Adam Goldthwaite plays Smokey Joe, and audiences will hear him sing a modified version of "Ghost of Smokey Joe," accompanied by his Ghost Brides, "Joe's Girls" (Donna and Hannah cheekily evoke the

“willies” of the classical ballet *Giselle*—ghosts of women who die alone after losing their fiancées to vices like greed, unfaithfulness, or pride).

But, Smokey Joe and the Ghost Brides aren't the only playful twists the Bontragers have in store in *American Christmas Carol*. In fact, Ballet Fantastique Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager's favorite artistic liberty was her choice to re-imagine the Christmas Spirits as female forces to be reckoned with.

“I wanted the spirits to be women,” says Donna Bontrager on her choice to re-cast Dickens' ghosts as female dancers. “These *pas de deus* are an opportunity to really embody Ebenezer's relationship with his past, present, and future. They dance with him, they manipulate him, they run at him, they challenge him.” The Spirits are danced by Suzanne Farrell Ballet guest dancer Jane Morgan (Christmas Past, to retro jazz hit “Why Don't You Do Right”) and Ballet Fantastique dancers Amanda Coleman (Christmas Present, to Frank Sinatra's “That's Life”) and Hannah Bontrager (Christmas Future, to Alfred Hibbler's “After the Lights Go Down Low”).

### **Live music: Halie Loren**

There's another strong female voice in the production, of course: Grammy-nominated singer (and local sweetheart) Halie Loren. Loren is best known for her purity of tone and rare interpretive prowess. She brings a fresh and original perspective to time-honored musical paths, forging bonds with diverse audiences in North America, Asia, and Europe. Loren's originals have earned multiple nominations for Independent Music Awards and Grammys. In *An American Christmas Carol*, Loren is accompanied by her jazz ensemble: Matt Treder (piano), Mark Schneider (bass), Brian West (drums/percussion), and Idit Shner (saxophone/clarinet). Of the collaboration, Loren says: “Pairing the nostalgia of 1940's music with such a well-known story as it has never before been told creates an experience of pure, nostalgic magic with a healthy dose of Film Noir glamour...” Says Loren. “It's definitely unlike anything I have performed before. Working with Ballet Fantastique on this production is the realization of a long-time dream of mine to integrate my music with dance performance. Ballet Fantastique is a truly inspired group with amazing visionaries at the helm.”

### **Score and scenes**

“Our score for *An American Christmas Carol* is 17 iconic standards songs that explore two related musical traditions—big band jazz and the popular tunes of Tin Pan Alley,” says Donna Marisa. Donna and Ballet Fantastique's creative team worked closely with Loren to choose introduce several new pieces to Loren's repertoire, including the Ella Fitzgerald classic “Undecided,” which Loren sings when fiancée Marilyn breaks off her engagement with the ever-greedier young Ebenezer. Traditionals including “Winter Wonderland,” “Baby It's Cold Outside,” “Let it Snow,” and “I'll Be Home For Christmas” also set the stage for the ballet's retro-glam choreography.

*An American Christmas Carol* opens with an introduction to Ebenezer Scrooge (Martino Sauter), nephew and new daughter-in-law Fred and Judy (Anthony Rosario and Leanne Mizzoni), and employee Bob Crachit (Richard Nebel). As Scrooge's pessimistic personality emerges, he has a strange vision in the old clock—not of the clock face, but of Marley, his long-dead business partner. The vision fades and Scrooge drifts to sleep until Marley re-appears, singing “The Ghost of Smokey Joe.” Marley and his Ghost Brides warn Scrooge that he will be haunted by three spirits. As promised, on the stroke of one, Christmas Past (guest artist Jane Morgan) arrives in “Why Don't You Do Right,” reminding Ebenezer of love gained and lost when he met Marilyn (Ashley Bontrager) at Fezziwig's party way back in the Roaring 20's. After returning to bed—and after the audience returns from intermission—Scrooge is visited by Christmas Present in Sinatra's “That's Life.” Christmas Present (Amanda Coleman) shows Scrooge the joys of Christmas through visions of Fred and Judy, and the Crachit family. Here, we will meet Tiny Tim (LilyAnn Halseide), who finds joy and delight in the world in spite of adversity in Nat King Cole's “Nature Boy.” Scrooge then meets Christmas Future (Hannah Bontrager) in an eerie tango with dance to Alfred Hibbler's “After the Lights Go Down Low.” Scrooge emerges his encounters with the Spirits a changed man, “glowing with his good intentions, as light as a feather, happy as an angel, and as merry as a schoolboy.”

### **Outreach performance**

Nearly 1,000 Lane County schoolchildren will participate in Ballet Fantastique's outreach performances on Thurs. Dec. 10. For more information or to sign up a school group, email [info@balletfantastique.org](mailto:info@balletfantastique.org).

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