

Ballet Fantastique transports fans

Small troupe offers a spirited Russian-style performance

By Gwen Curran

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The Hult Center's Soreng Theater was full with appreciative fans at Saturday's performance by Ballet Fantastique, which features music by Trio Voronezh in a program called "From Tchaikovsky to Tango."

A self-described chamber ballet company, Ballet Fantastique is a small group of dancers trained in the Russian Kirov style. Donna Marisa Bontrager is the artistic director and two of her daughters, Hannah and Ashley, dance in the company.

Alonzo Moore, the one male dancer, handled his parts extremely well, but you couldn't help but wonder if he felt hampered by the small Soreng stage. His tall body cried out for leaps.

In addition to the five well-trained adult dancers, several children from the Ballet Fantastique Academy also showed off their skills. Tom Newman projected well and could become a future soloist.

Trio Voronezh stole the show with its virtuosity, humor and close harmonic brilliance. Working together since 1993, this trio made its United States debut at the 1996 Oregon Bach Festival.

Sergei Teleshev plays the bayan, a chromatic button accordion, with great love and skill. Valerie Petrukhin holds the group together as he stands above his triangular double bass balalaika, the Russian three-string national instrument. His fingers flew! Vladimir Volokhin's fingers also flew on the domra, a three-string mandolin that has been

used in Russia since the 16th century. Vladimir is truly a master musician.

The first five pieces on the evening featured Trio Voronezh by themselves or accompanying the dancers. Although the music cried out for an emotional response, the dancers seemed caught in a web of classical posing and restrained movement. Moore delighted the audience in his Trepak. Ashley Bontrager looked stunning in her red Danse Russe costume and partnered well with Moore. By the end of the fifth piece I had been transported to Eastern Europe.

The recorded music for “Napolitaine” was disconcerting after the lusty live musicians. And kids! Cute, but somehow out of place in this adult performance.

The Trio Voronezh received a hearty welcome back after the children’s piece, the musicians playing with energy as Khachaturian’s “Sabre Dance” leapt off the stage. Speaking of leaps, why weren’t the dancers leaping? There was not one leap the entire evening.

The pas de deux from “Raymonda” was performed very well by Hannah Bontrager and Moore. Even the children moved with grace. The second half on the program was much more spirited. However, “The Dying Swan” with Nicola Thieme needs to be put away for another day. “Odalisques” from American Ballet Theater was refreshing, but “Polka Pizzicato” and “The Russian Ragtime” were the best.

Both the Trio Voronezh and the dancers looked as though they were actually enjoying the movement instead of merely performing steps. The smiles on their faces and joy in their bodies brought laughter to the audience. Kudos to Hannah Bontrager and Moore for the exciting adagio work! As one would expect, the performance was given a standing ovation.