

## **Ballet troupe trips the light Fantastique**

By Gwen Curran

*The Register-Guard*

Published: February 11, 2009, page E7

Saturday was a full night for Eugene audiences at the Hult Center. The Eugene Opera Company was performing “Il Trovatore” in the Silva Hall, and Ballet Fantastique filled the Soreng Theatre next door.

As I stood in the lobby and surveyed the happy crowd, I was reminded of the early days of raising money to build this performing arts center. Many said that people would not support such a large arts edifice.

They have certainly been proven wrong. I remember being at the gala opening on Sept. 24, 1982, and here it is — still acting as a beacon of cultural light some 27 years later.

Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager should be very proud of her Ballet Fantastique for performing exquisitely.

Act I was a whimsical interpretation of Camille Saint-Saëns “Carnival of the Animals,” commissioned by the Eugene Symphony to be danced with the orchestra Feb. 21.

My absolute favorite “animal” was the well known “Swan,” which was superbly danced by Ya Xi Fu. This recent addition from Shanghai moves with elegance, grace and super technique. She also danced the “Hen” with wit and lightness.

Ya Xi Fu has been dancing since the age of 4. She danced with the Shanghai Ballet School and trained at the Royal Opera House in London.

Hannah Bontrager, a very accomplished dancer herself, flew through the “Aviary,” barely touching the stage. Hannah is appearing in a dual

performance roster with Ballet Fantastique and the Nanassas Ballet Theatre in Virginia.

The costumes, by Donna Marisa Bontrager and Ellen Urrutia for both “Carnival of the Animals” and the subsequent piece, were fabulous.

Act II, “Danse en Rouge or Variations in Red” was exciting and passionate. The combination of skilled dancers, creative choreography, fine art, gorgeous costumes and accomplished musicians was a total success.

Classical guitarist John Jarvie immediately set the mood as he strolled onto the stage playing “Malaguena.”

Jarvie has performed classical guitar music for 30 years. Former Register-Guard arts reporter Fred Crafts described him as “a spectacularly gifted artist who commands the fingers of a virtuoso and the sensitivity of a poet,” and he certainly exhibited that command Saturday.

A slide of Margaret Coe’s painting, “Moncontour No. 1,” filled the backdrop. As Jarvie placed a red rose softly on the stage, Amelia Unsicker picked it up and danced romantically to his guitar.

Although Unsicker is new to Ballet Fantastique, she has trained with the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre and at the UO school of dance.

Jarvie and Unsicker performed three delightful duets during the evening.

“Don Quixote” came next, performed with original choreography by Marius Petipa. However, I had a problem with the transition from the live solo guitar to taped full orchestral music. It was a bit jarring to the ear.

Trio Voronezh took the stage next. The Russian musicians are always a favorite with their audiences, from Germany to Eugene. This is their second collaboration with Ballet Fantastique, and it seems a good fit.

Accompanied by the trio, Hannah Bontrager, Ashley Bontrager and Unsicker were passionate and flirty in “Besame Mucho” and

“Argentine Dance.” A projection of a painting by Adam Grasowsky called “Vermeer No. 6,” provided a backdrop for this superb collaboration.

My favorite work of the evening was the piano-based solo, “La Soledad/Solitude,” from Portland’s Pink Martini. Grosowsky’s “Piano Lesson” was the perfect set piece for the dance.

Ashley Bontrager, Hannah Bontrager, Ya Xi Fu, and Unsicker burned up the stage to original choreography by Donna and Hannah Bontrager. Bravo.

The concert ended with a humorous “Ragtime Suite,” with music by Trio Voronezh based on themes from Richard Galliano, Dmitry Shostakovitch, and Alexander Zigankov.

Choreography was by Hannah Bontrager and Alonzo Moore, who also works with Traduza Dance Company and the Oregon Festival of American Music.

The dancers all appeared to be having a good time in this set of pieces. The flow of the evening was perfect with music, painting and dance.

Do not miss Ballet Fantastique’s next concert. Well done.

*Gwen Curran of Eugene reviews dance for The Register-Guard.*