

Arts

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More Fantastique

Ballet Fantastique will have its audience seeing red as it returns to the scene of its most successful collaboration

By Bob Keefer

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Jerry Gowins

Ashley Bontrager will be among the featured dancers in Saturday's program at the Hult Center.

In 2007, Eugene's tiny Ballet Fantastique got together with the popular group Trio Voronezh for a first-time collaboration that proved wildly popular with audiences.

Now, the two groups are collaborating again and even adding some work by local painters to the equation.

“Danse en Rouge: Variations in Red” will be presented by both groups at the Hult Center in a single performance Saturday night.

“We performed with the trio last fall and were met by an overwhelming response from our audience — and from their audience,” says Ballet Fantastique executive director Hannah Joy Bontrager, who also dances in the company.

“We have always had a vision of collaboration, to intrigue audiences and keep dance exciting and relevant.”

“Danse en Rouge,” with its explorations of the color red, will be performed just in time for Valentine's Day.

The evening will be presented in two acts.

The first half showcases the ballet's new “Carnival of the Animals,” which was created last fall on commission from the Eugene Symphony for its youth concerts. The dancers will perform in 13 short pieces inspired by the Camille Saint-Saëns score.

“It can be difficult to find a dance company with a complete choreography of ‘Carnival of the Animals,’ and Ballet Fantastique has developed a beautiful program,” says Chris Collins, the symphony's operations director.

The second half of Saturday's show will be the “Danse en Rouge.” It features a range of pieces inspired by the color red, such as excerpts from the ballet “Don Quixote,” tango pieces from Trio Voronezh and a choreographed version of an early Pink Martini song: “La Soledad.”

Throughout the concert, classical guitarist John Jarvie will stroll through the stage and play music by Spanish composer Francisco Tárrega.

Another part of the collaboration will be purely visual. The ballet has obtained the loan of a couple of paintings by painters Adam Grosowsky and Margaret Coe from Eugene's Karin Clarke Gallery.

Coe's painting, of red roofs in Mediterranean France, will be projected behind the dancers during "Don Quixote." And Grosowsky's, a Jan Vermeer-like portrait, will be used as the backdrop for Trio Voronezh's "New York Tango," a piece by Franco-Italian accordionist Richard Galliano.

Dancers in the second half of the show will be wearing, of course, red costumes — all designed by artistic director Donna Marisa Bontrager.

"I love working with a theme for concerts because it focuses and defines the emotion and momentum of a performance," she says.

Adds Hannah Bontrager: "Danse en Rouge' gives our audiences the wonderful range of energy and repertoire that they come to expect from our concerts. We're challenging them to explore an evocative range of artistic styles — and to make connections — with us through the movement and the music."

Trio Voronezh got its start in Germany in 1993. The group made its United States debut in 1996 at the Oregon Bach Festival and performed with Ballet Fantastique in the 2007 performance "From Tchaikovsky to Tango."

Ballet Fantastique calls itself a "chamber ensemble" and has five company dancers. It will be joined in this performance by four or five apprentice dancers.

Dance preview

Danse en Rouge: Variations in Red

What: Ballet Fantastique performs with Trio Voronezh

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Hult Center's Soren Theatre, Seventh Avenue and Willamette Street

Tickets: \$25 to \$30, \$14 for students (682-5000)

Post-concert reception: At Karin Clarke Gallery, 760 Willamette St.; reception tickets are \$90, \$150 per couple, and include concert admission (342-4611)