

## The Register-Guard: *Arts: Arts*

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### **Ballet with a twist**

*Small troupe joins with a Russian musical trio to stage "chamber ballet"*

*By Bob Keefer*

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Smaller is better.

That's the message that Eugene's tiny Ballet Fantastique wants audiences to get this weekend when the chamber ballet company — more on that term later — takes to the stage at the Hult Center.

"Ballet" so often means big: big stage, big production, lots of dancers, a full orchestra in the pit.

Ballet Fantastique, which opened a studio here in 2001 and became a nonprofit two years ago, is a company of six. They'll be performing in the little Soreng Theater instead of the giant Silva Concert Hall on Saturday and Sunday.

And, instead of having an orchestra in the pit, the dancers will be accompanied by the three musicians of Trio Voronezh, those zany Moscow street musicians who stole the hearts of Oregon Bach Festival audiences a decade ago and never quite found their way back to Mother Russia.

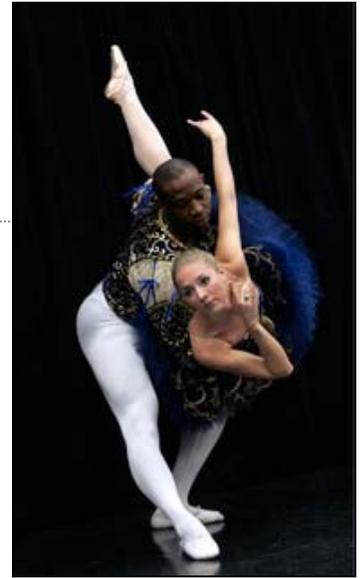
"We met at the Slavic Festival last year," explains Sergei Teleshev, who plays the bayan, a chromatic-button accordion, in the trio. "Way back in Russia we had experiences with traditional folk music. So this is fun. It's interesting. And it's something new for us."

Donna Marisa Bontrager, Ballet Fantastique's artistic director (and mom of two of the dancers), said she wanted to try a collaboration with the trio after hearing their music.

"One of the things that really inspired me was when I heard them play 'Danse Russe,'" she said. "That's a Tchaikovsky piece from 'Swan Lake.'"

There's more to the Russian connection than "Swan Lake." Bontrager had Russian Kirov training in New York before coming to Eugene. She's passed that tradition on to her daughters, Hannah Bontrager, who at 23 is the company's executive director, and Ashley Bontrager, a 21-year-old journalism student at the University of Oregon. Both dance in the company.

"Part of what makes us unique is we're a chamber ballet company," Hannah Bontrager explained. "Because we don't have 40 dancers, each of our dancers is of a soloist caliber and is able to command the attention of the audience. It's like the Oregon



## Mozart Players versus the (Eugene) Symphony.

“Eugene hasn’t had a chamber ballet company. This is a new thing for Eugene, and something we are trying to push and get audiences excited about.”

Among the dancers in Ballet Fantastique’s troupe is Alonzo Moore, who got recruited from Roseburg’s Traduza Dance Company when Ballet Fantastique and Traduza performed together at the Hult in 2005.

Moore, who studied classical ballet at Loyola University in New Orleans, toured Europe with a folk dance company before returning to the states and finally getting back to a classical company.

Performing with the flamboyant Trio Voronezh, he said, is “Awesome. Awesome! I feel right at home. These guys are such skilled musicians — their music is so dynamic — who wouldn’t want to dance to it?”

This weekend’s performance will open with a pas de deux set to J.S. Bach’s Scherzo in B-minor in an arrangement by Trio Voronezh.

“We reinterpreted the music with clean lines that melt into each other and continuously unfold to visually represent and play with the music’s layering,” Moore said.

The program moves on to works by Tchaikovsky and other Russian composers, including “Swan Lake.” Dancer Nicola Thieme will perform the Hungarian variation with Moore.

The Russian part of the program will also feature works such as “The Dying Swan,” written by French composer Camille Saint-Saëns and known as the trademark solo of Russian prima ballerina Anna Pavlova, who first performed the piece in 1905.

In the second half of the program the company will premiere a new tango and other Latin pieces.

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