



Meet the Artist: Hannah Bontrager and Ballet Fantastique



Photo: Stephanie Urso

Meet the Artist: Hannah Bontrager

by Luke Fannin

If you know anything about ballet, you know it is incredibly difficult. Even if you don't know anything about ballet, it wouldn't take you very long to figure that out. Try lifting your leg straight up over your head. Or standing up on the very tips of your toes.

Go ahead, try it.

Did you fall down?

That's okay. So did I.

And that's just the dancing part. Try being producer, choreographer, instructor, and executive director as well. That's exactly what Hannah Bontrager does for Ballet Fantastique. Founded in 2000 by Ms. Bontrager and her mother, Donna Marisa Bontrager, Ballet Fantastique is a Eugene-based organization which offers world-class professional dance training at its Academy, and also houses the acclaimed Ballet Fantastique Contemporary Chamber Company, made up of professional dancers from all across the country.



Photo: Stephanie Urso

Just sixteen years old when she helped her mother found the institution, Ms. Bontrager has been an integral part of it ever since. And it's not for lack of other opportunities: Ms. Bontrager has studied at some of the country's most prestigious dance institutions, including the Kirov Academy in Washington, D.C. After high school, Ms. Bontrager performed for the Colorado Ballet Company, and then went on to attend the Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon, where she earned degrees in English and Dance with a minor in community arts.

Invaluable as her experiences with other dance companies and institutions have been, they have only made Ms. Bontrager invest more of herself in Ballet Fantastique. "I can't tell you how many times I've been talking to someone and they say, 'Oh, I tried ballet. It wasn't my thing. My teacher made it very clear it wasn't for me.' That, to me, is so sad."

At Ballet Fantastique, the approach is progressive and goal-oriented, with students advancing only after they've met specific benchmarks. They emphasize small class sizes, extensive personal attention, and intellectual engagement with the training, even for the youngest dancers. "Our training is very serious and accelerated," says Ms. Bontrager, "but it actually makes ballet less stressful [than other training methods], because our students really know what they're doing. We believe our approach makes dancers feel personally successful."



Photo: Stephanie Urso

I asked Ms. Bontrager if, in light of the 25-plus years she has already put into ballet, she ever looks ahead to anything else. Her response was immediate, and as enthusiastic as every other answer she'd given me: "This is 120% my passion. I love what we're doing, and I'm so proud of it. I've danced with companies all over the country, and I can honestly say what we're doing is unique and important and meaningful. It's what I wake up for every day."

Ballet Fantastique offers multiple workshops and summer camps in the month of August, including ["Swan Lake Summer Camp" \(August 12-16\)](#) and ["Bravo I Ballet Intensive" \(August 5 -23\)](#), presented in association with Create! Eugene. For more information, [visit createeugene.org](http://visit.createeugene.org) or balletfantastique.org.