



TUNE IN TOMORROW

Orchestra Next and Eugene Ballet bring live music back to dance

One day last winter, UO music professor Brian McWhorter chanced to encounter Eugene Ballet Executive Director Riley Grannan at a local cafe. The company had recently performed McWhorter's original score, *Tyranny of the Senses*, he had just played trumpet with Portland's Oregon Ballet Theater and next year, his young children would be old enough to attend their first performance of Tchaikovsky's Christmas perennial, *The Nutcracker*. Maybe they could see dad play in the Eugene Ballet orchestra. Alas, Grannan informed McWhorter, the company hadn't been able to afford to use live musicians for the show since 2008. McWhorter was appalled. To him, and to many choreographers and dancers, the energy of live music, even with the unpredictability of human performers, invigorates dance in a way no recording ever can. But caught in a chronic funding crunch, many dance companies have substituted pre-recorded music for paid live musicians to cut costs.

"How about if I get an orchestra together for you?"

McWhorter offered, rashly. He'd conduct it himself if he had to. Grannan agreed. McWhorter, a jazzman from way back, quickly realized how impetuous his improvisation had been. "I didn't have an orchestra, I didn't have money to pay an orchestra and I'd never conducted an orchestra before," he recalls. Yet he knew he had to try.

In fact, he'd been thinking about the need for a particular kind of orchestra for a while. A one-time whiz kid on the New York avant garde music scene after graduating from the UO in 1998, McWhorter had returned to his alma mater a few years ago to take a faculty position. As an educator, he knew that budding musicians needed mentored live performance opportunities. He'd seen the value of such a training orchestra in conductor Benjamin Zander's Boston Philharmonic, which complemented the eminent professional Boston Symphony. But neither the ballet nor the Eugene Symphony would lead such an effort here.

So despite his busy academic and professional careers (primarily with his ensemble Beta Collide), McWhorter decided to create Orchestra Next.

Using his abundant musical connections, Facebook and other social media, McWhorter reached out to schools, private teachers and other youth orchestras and institutions. In a few weeks, more than 60 applicants (as young as 16 and as old as 65, some from as far away as New York City) auditioned via videos submitted through YouTube attesting to the desperate need for learning and performing opportunities for emerging musicians. He chose 30 students and 15 professionals (many from the UO) who'd be their mentors.

Rather than charging tuition, McWhorter decided instead to pay the students a \$250 stipend; the pros get union scale. To play four ballet performances and three rehearsals would cost \$20,000. McWhorter decided to crowdsource the funding using the donation site IndieGoGo. So far, with money pledged there and from other supporters, including Eugene Ballet's dancers, he's raised \$13,000. Although he's far from wealthy, McWhorter (who's spearheaded musical fundraisers for good causes from Katrina relief to climate change awareness) will probably wind up financing much of the rest it himself. And he won't pay himself a dime.

But he knows it'll be worth it. If Orchestra Next succeeds, this weekend's *The Nutcracker* performances will be only the beginning of a permanent regional training orchestra. Groups like the ballet that are forced to rely on canned sound — and most important, their audiences — could regain the thrill of live performances. And McWhorter himself has already benefited.

"I've learned so much," he explains. "The politics and practical stuff about fundraising and publicity aside, musically I feel like I've grown a lot these last few months just working on this score. It's been surprisingly challenging." But he has extra motivation. "My 2-year-old wakes up every morning and wants to put on her ballerina costume," he says. "She wants me to get my baton out and practice." ■

Eugene Ballet and Orchestra Next perform The Nutcracker 7:30 pm Dec. 21 and 22, and 2 pm Dec. 22 and 23, at the Hult Center; \$15-\$48.

Luckeys
CLUB 100 YEARS

THU 12/20 **Forget One Thing** [Indie]
FR 12/21 **Homeschool** [Rock/Pop]
SAT 12/22 **Papa Coyote** [Americana/Rock]

933 Olive St | 541-687-4643

In the heart of the Bermuda Triangle

Starlight LOUNGE

BEST HAPPY HOUR!
EW "BEST OF EUGENE 2007-12"

830 Olive St | 541-343-3204

Sunrise
Asian Food Market

Largest Selection of Asian Groceries
Seaweed, rice, noodles, frozen products, deli, snacks, drinks, sauces, spices, produce, housewares, and more.

We carry groceries from **Holland, India, Pakistan and Polynesia**
Sushi & Asian deli take-out

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL
CLOSED CHRISTMAS DAY

10% OFF EVERYTHING IN THE STORE!
* Excluding rice, case prices and phone cards.
Offer expires 12/26/12

www.sunriseasianfood.com
M-Th 9am-7pm • F 9am-8pm • Sa 9am-7pm • Su 10am-6pm
70 W. 29th Ave. Eugene • 541-343-3295

NextStep ReUse Store

Shop reuse and save!
Cell Phones & Desktops!

20% OFF

Sale runs 12/13 - 12/26. Limited to supplies on hand.

Open Daily 10am - 6pm
980 McKinley St

NEXTSTEP ReUse STORE

EUGENE OPERA PRESENTS

Gilbert & Sullivan's
The Pirates of Penzance

DECEMBER 28, 30 & 31
TICKETS: (541) 682-5000

www.eugeneopera.com

Hult Center for the Performing Arts