

The Adventures of Ballet Fantastique

The unconventional ballet company pirouettes into an exciting, cosmopolitan season BY SHELLEY DEADMOND

Travel. Take risks. Be a little dangerous. These are the inspirations for the upcoming 2013 season at what is arguably Eugene's most daringly innovative ballet company, Ballet Fantastique. Comprised of seven acclaimed dancers and co-directed by mother-daughter team Donna and Hannah Bontrager, Ballet Fantastique aspires to offer expressive ballet productions full of exploratory storytelling, original choreography and masterful technique.

The company will grace the stage of the Hult Center's Soreng Theater Feb. 2 and 3 to debut its newest effort, *The Misadventures of Casanova*. While the 18th-century Italian man is a well-known womanizer, this Venetian masquerade will feature strong female characters besting the masterful flirt in deft, clever ways.

"We're very driven by the dramatic aspect of things," executive director Hannah Bontrager says. The *Casanova* ballet employs some narration to enhance the storytelling, traditional baroque-era dance influences and compelling

musical choices, such as recordings of the Louvre Orchestra playing on antique instruments to try to "bring the audience back in time," Bontrager says.

As a company that simply doesn't do traditional ballet (no *Swan Lake*, no *The Nutcracker*), Fantastique has a knack for and enjoys attracting a nontraditional ballet audience, including the elusive 19-to-35 aged crowd that so many performance arts companies are eager to please, as well as guests who've never been to a ballet before.

The company is equally excited to be moving ahead with research and planning for a spring premiere of the first ballet version (as far as they are aware) of author Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* — and certainly the first *Pride* ballet reset to the scene of Paris in the roaring '20s. Working with local jazz musicians Gerry Rempel and the Jazz Syndicate, the production, set for May at the Hult, will be live in every sense of the word.



Bontrager says of the production, "It's been really fun to choose shows throughout the years that we feel can really highlight the powerful women that we have in our company ... We're very excited about the production."

Utilizing diverse stylings, brave musical choices and the impassioned expression fans expect from the artistic medium, Ballet Fantastique will surely prove as nimble as ever this season. It's ballet like you've never seen it, so if you haven't seen it yet — do. ■

The Adventures of Casanova shows 7:30 pm Saturday, Feb. 2, and 2:30 pm Sunday, Feb. 3. Pride and Prejudice shows 7:30 pm May 4 and 2:30 pm May 5. Both performances will be at the Soreng Theater, Hult Center; \$19-\$33.

Nine Female Faces of War

The struggle of Iraqi women finds a face at the University Theatre BY AMY SCHNEIDER

The UO Department of Theatre Arts continues to bring new perspectives to the stage with its production of *9 Parts of Desire*, a play that delves into the lives of Iraqi women. The play is set to debut in March, marking the 10th anniversary of the Iraq War.

Iraqi-American playwright Heather Raffo wrote (and has acted in) the piece to connect with American audiences and communicate the struggles that Iraqi women face. It's working — the play has received shining accolades from *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* — and perhaps that's because Raffo spent 11 years researching and interviewing people across four continents before putting pen to paper. Nine distinct characters, all

Iraqi women in various stations of life — including an artist, communist and an exile — tell their stories as intimate confessionals. Initially intended to be a one-person show, the UO performance will feature eight separate actresses. A chorus of all eight actresses fills out the ninth role.

"Each woman expresses her personal views on how the war affected her," says Michael Najjar, an assistant professor at UO and the play's director. "It brings to fore the voices of the people who were affected by the war, not the warriors themselves, not the people in power, but the people who were exiled by war or lost family members."

Through a series of monologues, *9 Parts of Desire* lets the viewer peek past the shrouded figures that often come to mind at the mention of Iraqi women. The iconic image of an Iraqi woman in a hijab creates a physical

barrier, making it difficult to connect with the individual behind the veil. Raffo's play challenges this perception by illustrating the vivid personalities of Iraqi women, offering contrary viewpoints and revealing multiple dimensions to commonly stereotyped characters.

The disclosures from a bitter wife gain perspective when paired with the laments of a war-zone doctor. Each character tells her own story and contributes to the play's larger message of diversity and complexity within a culture largely misunderstood by the West.

Bringing in female perspectives, Najjar says, is particularly important. "Women have to bear the brunt of the loss and tragedies that wars bring," he says. "The female voice is so often ignored or lost within this greater dialogue that's mainly carried out by males."

By mimicking a Middle Eastern-style of theater where an audience encircles the storyteller, Najjar says he hopes to "create a sense of community" and offer an intimate performance. ■

9 Parts of Desire plays March 7-17 at the UO's Hope Theatre. Call 346-4363 for more information.

Mission Accomplished!

Northwest Ten soldiers on BY ANNA GRACE

Alien sex fantasies, extreme family dysfunction and God-fish; it's all in an evening's work for the Northwest Festival of Ten Minute Plays. Taking on new adjudication, a new space at Lord Leebrick Theatre's Broadway location and 10 more budding playwrights, NW 10 is in rehearsals, and on its way.

This year's title, *Northwest Ten: Mission Accomplished!* sums up the insanity. Producer Paul Calandrino comments, "Since it's our fifth season, we thought we should celebrate. Just as when George W. Bush proclaimed an end to major combat operations in the Iraq War, we hope that by proclaiming 'mission accomplished' the festival will continue on for at least another seven or eight years."

Awesome.



"We know most of the playwrights in town, and I have been teaching playwriting through Lord Leebrick for a couple of years, so even though the plays were submitted to us blind, we often knew who wrote which play. Anybody who tells you that they can be completely unbiased when it comes to choosing between a friend's play and the work of a complete stranger is being less than candid."

This new selection process applied to Calandrino's work as well, and when the producer submitted his play

The festival is stepping it up, enlisting the help of playwright and professor Deborah Brevoort (NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and Goddard College) to select the plays. Calandrino and Connie Bennett selected the plays for the previous shows, but felt that an outside eye might be more impartial. According to Calandrino,

there was no guarantee it would be chosen. "It was nerve racking for me. But Connie and I both resigned ourselves to the possibility that our plays would not be selected. We felt strongly that this was one of the only ways to give every playwright a fair shake."

Calandrino's play, *Daggit*, was one of the final eight chosen, and Calandrino is excited about the rest of the lineup, too. "We have realism, absurdism, fantasy, straight-up comedy, heartfelt comedy, mystery, satire and deeply moving drama."

There will be numerous themes and subjects addressed, Calandrino notes, such as "the toll active military service can take on a person's equilibrium and perspective, the consequences of leaving extremely awkward voicemail messages, how couples can grow apart, split and then inexplicably find themselves more perfectly matched, and the angst many of us feel over the gradual extinction of the natural world."

Phew. Sounds like quite an evening! Mark your calendar and get your tickets for a wild evening now, for according to Calandrino, "I think it's impossible to identify a unifying concept for this show, except for dramatic excellence." ■

Northwest Ten: Mission Accomplished! runs April 5-13 at Lord Leebrick Theatre, 194 W. Broadway.