

Movers & Shakers

MEET THE PEOPLE WHO SHAPE EUGENE'S DANCE COMMUNITY

Words by Alex Notman / Photos by Todd Cooper

Eugene may not have Moscow's Bolshoi or New York's Martha Graham Dance Company; however, just below the city's surface is a vibrant world of dance, of clacking heels and pointed toes, of "pop, lock and drops" and ball changes. From classical performances at the Eugene Ballet Company and sensual Middle Eastern folk dance at Celebration Belly Dance and Yoga to pioneering modern dance at the University of Oregon and glitzy hip-hop productions at Work Dance Company, there's a groove for everyone's mood. In our first-ever dance issue, *EW* has sought out the people who are elevating the level of dance in our community and the level of community in our dance. Meet this year's movers and shakers.

THE CLASSIC

Toni Pimble

Artistic director and resident choreographer,
Eugene Ballet Company

Toni Pimble has been a fixture in the Eugene ballet scene since 1978, but her dance history dates back to her childhood living room in England, where she would twirl to her parents' classical music. The living room became the prestigious Elmhurst School for Dance where Pimble danced from ages 11-18 before joining dance companies in Germany, where she met Riley Grannan, now Eugene Ballet Company's managing director. They hopped the pond to Oregon to start their own company. "We were adventuresome young people," Pimble says with a smile. "I never imagined it would grow so big." The Eugene Ballet Company is big; the company is a Eugene and Pacific Northwest cornerstone of ballet with 21 dancers from around the country performing 40-50 shows a year, including classics like *The Nutcracker* and *Scheherazade* (and some not-so-classics like the 2014 production of *Zoot Suit Riot* with the Cherry Poppin' Daddies).



THE INNOVATORS

Hannah Bontrager

Executive director and choreographer, Ballet Fantastique

Donna Bontrager

Artistic director and choreographer, Ballet Fantastique

Cinderella as a rock opera? A tongue-in-cheek feminist twist on the *The Misadventures of Casanova*? *Pride and Prejudice* set in the Roaring Twenties? The women behind Ballet Fantastique's productions, mother-and-daughter team Donna and Hannah, are not afraid to push the boundaries of the Russian Vaganova method taught at their company. The duo, who have more than 50 years of ballet training combined, also refuse to cast dancers by the rigid standards rampant in ballet; there are no height restrictions. "For us, diversity is worth it," Hannah says. Together, they research, write and choreograph all of their ballets from scratch — for *Casanova* they prepped by reading the playboy's autobiography. The world is taking notice of their innovative, whimsical approach. Ballet Fantastique recently returned from Italy, where they performed *As You Like It: A Wild West Ballet*. *Cinderella: A Rock Opera Ballet* will tour Trinidad and Tobago next summer.