

The Dragon, Night Queen meet in Florence

Ballet Fantastique Review

By ELLEN TEMPLAR

Florence had the unique opportunity to witness the premier performance of "The Dragon and the Night Queen," created by Donna Marisa Bontrager and her daughter, Hannah Bontrager.

Hannah Bontrager danced several parts and was production manager, along with Justin Fiemster.

Gerry Rempel and Eliot Grasso created many spectacular, original pieces and arrangements for this dramatic ballet.

Bravo to the musician's live performance!

Act I started in the woods with rich colors in shades of green. The bagpipes, "Uilleann" pipes, presented the mood for this Celtic ballet. Dancers portrayed joy and celebration and then the drums added an effect similar to "River Dance."

The dancers performed with energetic combinations of classical ballet and folk dance steps — a wonder to behold.

Costumes in rich, deep velvets of reds, orange, and greens took one's breath away. The vocalists, Cindy Kinny and Alyse Jamieson, created rich tones of longing that transported the audience to another time and place. As the drums continued their steady pace, the musicians created a gentle, yet strong feeling of reverence.

When the hero, "Cian," performed by Anthony Rosario, expressed his love for "Annora," (Ashley Bontrager) she indicated that he needed to prove his love by acquiring a golden apple. His adventure led him into the enchanted forest, where Morgan le Fey appeared.

Dancer Leanne Mizzoni created a powerful woman of authority and wisdom through her dance. The music of the ballet again grabbed you with intensity. Mizzoni danced with the classical and folk combination styling that was prominent in this ballet.

When the cymbals chimed, the music got faster and faster, and you felt the excitement in the room. Morgan le Fey instructed Cian that before she could give him the golden apple, he must slay the dragon and free his captive, "Princess Serena" (Ashley Bontrager).

The magic bird, "Saoirse," performed by Leanne Mizzoni, accompanied Cian on his journey. Mizzoni's portrayal of the bird was so believable you were actually convinced that she was a bird. She demonstrated excellent dramatic and dance skills.

However, when the dragon appeared, he stole the show.

With such understated costuming, there was no doubt who he was and the power he wielded. Richard Nebel II created, with his acting ability and athletic strength, a very believable dragon. This writer was affected by the ability of Princess Serena, captive of the dragon, to keep her royal dignity even under such difficult imprisonment.

The scene changed to a sense of stability and permanence as two dancers represented water fountains in an ancient garden. Kendra Elliott and Della Griffin displayed great ability to represent water flowing into a basin through the use of their arms alone. Their glazed look effectively convinced the audience that they were inanimate water fountains.

Act II opened to "Morrigan, the Warrior King," and the ravens dancing to dramatic music.

The power of these dancers to keep up with the Celtic drum and the fast beat of

the music was inspiring.

The battle ensued between Morrigan and the dragon and was represented by the bold dance moves, dramatic gestures and strengths. As the music climaxed to a crescendo, the dragon wounded Morrigan and Morrigan was carried away by his companions.

This intense scene was followed by a sweet, gentle setting of the king and queen showing their love and affection for each other. The heart calmed from the previous scene as Hanna Bontrager, this time as Queen, and Jim Ballard as King, portrayed a loving, caring couple.

In the next scene, all characters were in battle against the dragon. The choreography was such that colorful costuming, powerful and graceful dancing, and increasingly intense music all went on at the same time, but the spacing between dancers allowed the audience to see all the action at once.

Cian, taking the magical sword, conquered and killed the dragon brilliantly!

Richard Nebel II's portrayal of the dragon was exceptional and it was sad that he would not be dancing more.

The ballet ended in great joy with almost all characters and dancers on the stage. The audience was instantly up on its feet applauding as the performers bowed repeatedly.

Presented by SEACoast producers, Karen Smales and Sandy Kuhlman, Ballet Fantastique was the fourth in Seacoast Entertainment Association's 2015-2016 concert series.

Don't miss the next exciting event when SEA brings the Glenn Miller Orchestra to the FEC Flat Floor on Friday, March 18, at 7 p.m.

Call the FEC box office for tickets at 541-997-1994.

Eugene pianist to tickle ivories in Florence

Eugene pianist and composer Neil Patton will be appearing in concert Sunday, March 13, at 7 p.m., as part of Kathy Parsons' House Concert series in Sandpines West (Florence).

Patton's most recent album, "Between Shadow and Light," was awarded Album of the Year on MainlyPiano.com.

It has been nominated for several other awards as well.

"Between Shadow and Light" is one of the most beautiful and affecting albums I have ever reviewed," said Parsons.

Patton will be playing music from this album as well as from his previous two solo piano albums, ensuring that this will be a very memorable evening of music.

Patton composed a piano duet with David Nevue that he and Parsons are planning to

perform together at the concert.

In addition to composing and performing, Patton is a singer and songwriter, and has worked as a producer and arranger for local artists. He also helps young musicians find their voices as composers and songwriters.

An in-demand piano instructor, both privately and through New Hope Christian College, Patton also serves part-time as Pastor of Worship Arts at Emerald Bible Fellowship in Eugene.

There is a suggested donation of \$15 at the door. CDs and songbooks will be available for purchase and autographing.

The address and directions will be furnished when reservations are made by calling Parsons at 541-999-9720.

Local beaders can participate in CROW contest

Local beaders and jewelry makers are invited to participate in CROW's upcoming production of "Shrek the Musical Jr." The nonprofit youth theatre group's production requires three sparkling crystal necklaces similar to the one worn in the animated feature films. These three necklaces will be worn onstage by "Young Fiona," "Teen Fiona" and "Adult Fiona," and the actresses will get to keep them at the end of the run.

CROW is challenging local artists to design one, two or all three necklaces, and the production team will select the three winning pieces to be worn onstage for the show.

It is not necessary that they all match, but that they all coordinate and have a similar medieval-period style.

For style ideas, CROW artistic director Melanie Heard recommends jewelry artists look at the necklaces worn in the

Broadway production of Shrek by Sutton Foster.

"Be creative. Use your imagination — and have fun."

Not only will the handmade creation(s) be featured onstage for packed houses at the Florence Events Center (April 15-17), but the winner(s) will receive mention in the program as "Fiona's Royal Jewelry Designer," along with two complimentary tickets to the show.

Deadline for submission is March 8.

To participate, contact Heard at 541-999-8641 or email crowtheatrekids@yahoo.com.

Participants will need to arrange to drop off entries to Heard or have it picked up by a CROW representative.

Necklaces that are not selected to be worn onstage will be sold at CROW's lobby boutique and profits will go toward scholarships for kids

who cannot afford to attend 2016 CROW summer camp.

For more information on the CROW nonprofit youth theatre arts program, visit www.crowkids.com.

Big Mix at Hult Center aims at entrepreneurs

Kickstarter can help fund business needs and artistic endeavors. Entrepreneurs are invited to come to the Big Mix V2, an event aimed at showing how to utilize Kickstarter and other crowd-funding resources, on Saturday, March 12, from 1 to 5 p.m.

The event is at the Hult Center in Eugene, on 7th and Willamette streets.

Big Mix V2 will feature a keynote presentation by Terry Romero of Kickstarter, a panel presentation by John Hull of the University of Oregon, and regional crowd-funding experts in food, film, craft and games.

Regional Accelerator, Innovation Network (RAIN) and the City of Florence are working to bring entrepreneurs to the Oregon coast and activate and empower the businesses already here.

Tickets are \$25 per person or \$20 for students.

Register at www.hultcenter.org/SiteCM3/Directory_View.aspx?ID=4350.

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