

BALLET

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FANTASTIQUE

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+ HANNAH BONTRAGER**
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QUICK FACTS:

- **WHAT:** The world premiere of Ballet Fantastique's contemporary ballet, *Babes in Toyland* with LIVE music by Swing Shift Orchestra playing vintage big band music, including Duke Ellington's *Nutcracker*
- **CONCEPT + CHOREOGRAPHY:** All-original, by choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager
- **EUGENE PERFORMANCES (SORENG THEATER, HULT CENTER):**
Fri. Dec. 13, 7:30 pm; Sat. Dec. 14, 7:30 pm; Sun. Dec. 15, 2:30 pm
Student Outreach Performance: Thurs. Dec. 12, 10 am: Soreng Theater, Hult Center. Interested student groups, please contact Megan Hobbs, Outreach Coordinator (info@balletfantastique.org or 541-342-4611) **OUTREACH SHOW SOLD OUT**
- **TICKETS:** Tickets \$28-76 (students/youth \$18-65), with \$5 off regularly priced tickets for groups of five or more.
On sale now through the Hult Center Box Office: 541-682-5000 or www.hultcenter.org

Ballet Fantastique's retro-glam new ballet telling of a lost holiday classic, set to live music by Swing Shift Orchestra

In Ballet Fantastique's new *Babes in Toyland* this Dec. 13–15 in the Hult Center's Soreng Theater, Choreographer-Producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager reimagine a lost holiday classic with retro-glam choreography, vivacious style, and the company's contagiously magical wit and whimsy. Victor Herbert's original madcap fairytale mashup collides with hot jazz—played live by the incredible Swing Shift Orchestra (Steve Sharp, Music Director) with vocalists from the UO Gospel Singers—and splashy, genre-defying dance. The project premiere has been generously funded in part by a grant from the Nils and Jewel Hult Foundation.

"I wanted to do this story because it brings back memories from my childhood, growing up in the early 1960s. It's an era I remember and relate to. I literally watched the 'Mouseketeers' every day after school," says Ballet Fantastique Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager. "*Babes in Toyland* is a forgotten holiday classic, which gives me so much storytelling and choreographic freedom. The story is filled with joviality and lovable, familiar storybook characters."

"This is what Ballet Fantastique is all about: All-original new ballet theater, live music, and great storytelling," adds Hannah Bontrager, Co-Choreographer Producer.

About the Story/Music

To create their new 75-minute original contemporary ballet, Donna and Hannah have fused aspects from past tellings of the story (including Victor Herbert's original 1903 operetta, the 1934 Laurel and Hardy film, the 1961 Disney film, and an old storybook brought in by two young Ballet Fantastique Academy students, who first suggested the idea!), as well as re-writing aspects of the tale to create their new ballet.

"In the process of creating Ballet Fantastique's new works of dance theater, we choose live music artists that we feel will fit the story production that we want to do—in this case, Swing Shift Orchestra playing big band music, including Duke Ellington's *Nutcracker*," says Donna.

Donna, Hannah, and BFan librettist-historian Deborah Speer worked with Swing Shift Orchestra librarian Travis Wong to choose an original score of arrangements for the *Babes in Toyland* premiere. The ballet's custom score includes Ellington's *Nutcracker* as well as a number of Glenn Miller arrangements and big band renditions of traditional holiday favorites such as "White Christmas." Under the baton of **Steve Sharp**, Swing Shift Orchestra's 17 members will play this custom score live, including **woodwinds** (Alexis Rosenberg, Lead; Travis Wong; Dan Kruse; Richard Johnson; Doug DuPriest), **trumpets** (Katrina Lane, Lead; Jonathan Light; Chris Peters; T.J. Nees), trombones (Ryan Chaney, Lead; Alan Wood; Paul Roth; Aaron Anderson), **guitar** (Robin Fey); **piano** (Matt Svoboda), **bass** (Alexandre Pabst), and **drums/percussion** (Don Elkington). The project also brings in a team of four singers from the **UO Gospel Singers** (Yujun Fan, Anna Herbst, Eric Huhesulide, Jacquelyn Kopp), under *Babes in Toyland* vocal ensemble coordinator and singer **Laurie Hammond**. Several rows of seats are being taken out of the Hult Center's Soreng Theater to accommodate the orchestra.

Ballet Fantastique's Babes in Toyland libretto

In Rhyme I (Act I), it's Christmastime in Candyland. Even though they are very busy (watching her garden grow), **Mary, Quite Contrary** (danced by Carolin Koepplin) **Tom, the Piper's Son** (Jim Ballard) and were also preparing for their upcoming nuptials. Their friends are: **Little Bo Peep** (Ashley Bontrager) and **Little Boy Blue** (Gustavo Ramirez), **Jack and Jill** (NYC guest artist Cody Olsen, Madeline Gambino) and the **Gumdrops** (Brooke Bero, Taylor Harrison, Jenavieve Hernandez, Sophia MacMillan, and Madeline Gambino). The villainous **Barnaby Barnacle, Lord of Licorice and Landlord of Candyland** (Gabriel Ritzmann) not only wanted to ruin Christmas for everyone, but he also wanted to marry Mary so that he could steal all of her money! Barnaby Barnacle was always seen with the **Fairy Dragee** (his older sister, who made great ginger snaps but was very, very unkind; Tracy Fuller) and **Gonzo the Glop** (Isabella Fernandes), strong as an ox and dumb as a doornail. Together, Barnaby, Fairy Dragee, and Gonzo are plotting how to kidnap Tom at the Choo Choo Ch'Boogie Dance—so that Barnaby could throw Tom into the Chocolate Swamp and marry Mary himself. Gonzo is strong, but not very smart. Tom quickly escapes Gonzo's net and away does run. Tom and Mary fall asleep in the Candycane Forest as the snowflakes start to fall.

In Rhyme II (Act II), we find ourselves in Toyland on the morning of Christmas Eve, as Tom and Mary wake up to meet the **Toymakers** (Sophia MacMillan and Jenavieve Hernandez). Tom and Mary work together to see if they could fix the broken Toy Machine in time to save the Toys: The **Jack-in-the-Box and the Two Mechanical Dolls** (Gabriel Ritzmann, Brooke Bero, Madeline Gambino), the **Toy Soldiers** (Lead Lieutenant Gustavo Ramirez), **Princess Lollipop** (Ashley Bontrager), **the Cowboy and Cowgirl** (Cody Olsen and Tracy Fuller), and the **Gingerbread Kids** (student dancers from The Academy of Ballet Fantastique)! A terrific Toyshop battle ensues, and it's the Toy Machine that saves Toyland when it turns Barnaby into a tiny teddy bear.

Original project designs

"To create a new ballet, Ballet Fantastique's creative team does a lot of things all at the same time! At the same time as we are writing our libretto, we are deciding on the characters and the narrative arc of each scene," says Hannah on the creative process. "Once we've crafted our story and have decided who's on stage, we work with our creative team to hand-pick songs (usually about 14-20 pieces of music) that will help tell each part of the story. We're also simultaneously working on scenic and costume design plans and choreographing with our team of 18 Ballet Fantastique professional dancers."

Ballet Fantastique's *Babes in Toyland* world premiere project brings together a formidable team of artists: Ballet Fantastique Choreographer-Producers Donna and Hannah Bontrager are joined by international costume designer Allison Ditson, headpiece designer Mitra Chester, set designer Kelle DeForrest and Ballet Fantastique set designer/master Mike Ricker, and Ballet Fantastique's resident librettist-historian, Deborah Speer.

Donna's artistic color palette is lots of red, lavender, mossy green, gold. "I love the idea of doing a story that has this soft nostalgia. I want to bring back the feel of glamorous 50 and 60s Hollywood, with its bright, lavish, uptight fashion and technicolor." Sets are whimsical, a nod to a 1950's Candyland board game. "And our jovial characters also need completely over-the-top sets and props to help tell the story: Twelve children come out of a giant shoe, Barnaby Barnacle needs his crooked house where he can make his dreadful plans," she adds.

Tickets are available in person at the Hult Center or online at www.balletfantastique.org. Limited tickets/seating still available.

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For high-resolution images of the production, please email events@balletfantastique.org