

# Ballet FANTASTIQUE

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## QUICK FACTS:

- **WHAT:** Ballet Fantastique's THANKSGIVING WEEKEND performance in the Silva Concert Hall, *American Christmas Carol*, with LIVE music from international chart-topping jazz singer Halie Loren and her jazz ensemble
- **CONCEPT + CHOREOGRAPHY:** All-original, by choreographer-producers Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager
- **EUGENE PERFORMANCES (SILVA CONCERT HALL):** Thanksgiving Weekend: Sat. Nov. 30, 7:30pm & Sun. Dec. 1, 2:30pm
- **TICKETS:** Tickets \$22-76 (students/youth \$15-65), with \$5 off regularly priced tickets for groups of 6+. On sale now through the Hult Center Box Office: 541-682-5000 or [www.hultcenter.org](http://www.hultcenter.org)

## THANKSGIVING WEEKEND IN THE SILVA:

After captivating audiences with their Emmy® nominated and Silver Telly award-winning 2020 cinematic adaptation, Ballet Fantastique proudly brings its *American Christmas Carol* to the Hult's Silva Concert Hall for the first time, in collaboration with Grammy®-nominated jazz vocalist Halie Loren.

***American Christmas Carol:*** Donna and Hannah Bontrager have re-imagined Charles Dickens' beloved story in iconic post-WWII America with their original choreography set to the velvet voice of international chart-topping jazz singer—and Eugene's own—Halie

Loren. The Bontragers' retro-glam choreography fuses drama and humor as it weaves the story of Ebenezer Scrooge's transformative quest. Loren sets the score with her winsome original arrangements of standards by Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, and Nat King Cole. Actor Adam Goldthwaite returns as "Smokey Joe" Marley.

"If you imagine what a ballet-Broadway version of *A Christmas Carol* is, that's sort of how I would describe this project," says Ballet Fantastique Co-Choreographer-Producer Hannah Bontrager. "We look at how to best tell the story and make it fun for modern audiences. We immerse ourselves in the aesthetic and music of the era, we choose songs that tell the story—even tweaking lyrics if needed. We also re-imagine the perspective from which we tell the story."

In this case, Ballet Fantastique's unique new narrative perspective is a 40's Brooklyn gangster, "Smokey Joe" Marley, a period-inspired re-imagining of the character of *Jacob Marley* (Scrooge's long-dead slimy business partner) in Dickens's original. The Bontragers and their creative team (including Ballet Fantastique staff Librettist/Historian Genevieve Speer) birthed Joe out of the 1939 Cab Calloway song "The Ghost of Smokey Joe."

"When Genevieve brought us the Cab Calloway song, we knew it was perfect," says Ballet Fantastique Artistic Director and Choreographer-Producer Donna Marisa Bontrager. "This gravelly song about a really bad guy became our inspiration for a comedic character that drives the drama. And artistically, Smokey Joe's voice also lends our ballet a bit of grit and humor." Guest actor-singer and regular Ballet Fantastique guest artist Adam Goldthwaite plays Smokey Joe, and audiences will hear him sing a modified version of "Ghost of Smokey Joe," accompanied by his Ghost Brides, "Joe's Girls" (Donna and Hannah cheekily evoke the "willies" of the classical ballet *Giselle*—ghosts of women who die alone after losing their fiancées to vices like greed, unfaithfulness, or pride).

But, Smokey Joe and the Ghost Brides aren't the only playful twists the Bontragers have in store in *American Christmas Carol*. In fact, Ballet Fantastique Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager's favorite artistic liberty was her choice to re-imagine the Christmas Spirits as female forces to be reckoned with.

"I wanted the spirits to be women," says Donna Bontrager of her choice to re-cast Dickens' ghosts as female dancers. "These *pas de deux* are an opportunity to really embody Ebenezer's relationship with his past, present, and future. They dance with him, they manipulate him, they run at him, they challenge him." The Spirits are danced by Ballet Fantastique dancer Brooke Geffrey Bowler (Christmas Past, to retro jazz hit "Why Don't You Do Right"), Isabelle Bloodgood (Christmas Present, to Frank Sinatra's "That's Life") and Hannah Bontrager (Christmas Future, to Alfred Hibbler's "After the Lights Go Down Low").

***American Christmas Carol: A Ballet Movie***: Filmed in iconic locations across the lush Pacific Northwest in Fall 2020, Emmy® nominated and Silver Telly award-winning *American Christmas Carol: A Ballet Movie*, is Ballet Fantastique's 1940's jazz ballet spin on the Charles Dickens classic, reimagined in post-WWII America...and told on the big screen. This genre-defying collaboration between cinematographer Jeremy Bronson and the Bontragers features Ballet Fantastique's team of international professional ballet dancers, who rehearsed in quarantine bubbles during the Fall of 2020. During a time when the rest of the dance world shut down, Ballet Fantastique found a way to continue creating new art and bring it to audiences in a unique format.

"This is a uniquely accessible blend of film, theater and classical ballet, used to tell a cultural touchstone story in a totally new way," says Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager. "It's ballet theater on the big screen, for the time we're living in right now."

*American Christmas Carol: A Ballet Movie* film set locations include: The turn-of-the-century Oregon Electric Station (Eugene, OR), Portland's White House (Portland, OR), Trinity Episcopal Church (Portland, OR), Eugene Masonic Cemetery (Eugene, OR), Walker Union Church and Cemetery (Walker, OR), Ken Scott's River Run Gallery (Leaburg, OR), the Shelton McMurphey Johnson House Museum (Eugene, OR), Mims Historic Cottage/NAACP Lane County (Eugene, OR), and community restaurants and bookstores local to Ballet Fantastique, including many closed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Halie Loren: Nominated for the 2024 Grammy® awards**, Loren is best known for her purity of tone and rare interpretive prowess. She brings a fresh and original perspective to time-honored musical paths, forging bonds with diverse audiences in North America,

Asia, and Europe. Signed in Asia by JVC/Victor Entertainment and to the rest of the world with Canadian-based Justin Time Records, her multi-genre and multi-lingual musical blend across her eleven albums to-date has earned several national and international awards in multiple genres as well as significant critical and chart success along the way. Her albums consistently chart at #1 on the Billboard/Japan Jazz Charts, iTunes (Canada and Japan) and Amazon Music, and her originals have earned multiple successes for Independent Music Awards. In *An American Christmas Carol*, Loren is accompanied by her jazz ensemble: Matt Treder (piano), Sean Peterson (bass), Joe Manis (saxophone/clarinet), and Ryan Biesack (drums/percussion).

“Our score for *An American Christmas Carol* is 17 iconic standards songs that will take the audience on a journey through two distinct, but related musical traditions—big band jazz and the popular songwriting of Tin Pan Alley,” says Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager. The Bontragers worked with Loren to choose from songs already in her repertoire and to introduce new pieces, including the Ella Fitzgerald classic “Undecided,” which Loren sings when fiancée Marilyn breaks off her engagement with the ever-greedy young Ebenezer. Traditionals including “Winter Wonderland,” “Let it Snow,” and “I’ll Be Home For Christmas” also set the stage for the Bontragers’ retro-glam spin.

Of the collaboration, Loren says: “Working with Ballet Fantastique on this production is the realization of a long-time dream of mine to integrate my music with dance performance. I truly could not ask for a better dance company to collaborate with! Ballet Fantastique is a truly inspired group with amazing visionaries at the helm.”

**Score & scenes:** *An American Christmas Carol* opens with an introduction to Ebenezer Scrooge (Preston Andrew Patterson), nephew and new daughter-in-law Fred and Judy (Jenavieve Hernandez & Gustavo Ramirez), and employee Bob Cratchit (Tavari Groesbeck). As Scrooge’s pessimistic personality emerges, he has a strange vision in the old clock—not of the clock face, but of Marley, his long-dead business partner. The vision fades and Scrooge drifts to sleep until Marley re-appears, singing “The Ghost of Smokey Joe.” Marley and his Ghost Brides warn Scrooge that he will be haunted by three spirits. As promised, on the stroke of one, Christmas Past (Brooke Geffrey Bowler) arrives in “Why Don’t You Do Right,” reminding Ebenezer of love gained and lost when he met Marilyn (Ashley Bontrager) at Fezziwig’s party way back in the Roaring 20’s. After returning to bed—and after the audience returns from intermission—Scrooge is visited by Christmas Present in Sinatra’s “That’s Life.” Christmas Present (Isabelle Bloodgood) shows Scrooge the joys of Christmas through visions of Fred and Judy, and the Cratchit family. Here, we will meet Tiny Tim (Finley Bontrager Mcredy—Hannah’s real-life four year old son!), who finds joy and delight in the world in spite of adversity in Nat King Cole’s “Nature Boy.” Scrooge then meets Christmas Future (Hannah Bontrager) in an eerie tango with dance to Alfred Hibbler’s “After the Lights Go Down Low.”

Scrooge emerges his encounters with the Spirits a changed man, “glowing with his good intentions, as light as a feather, happy as an angel, and as merry as a schoolboy.”