

## Albuquerque performance artists to bring storytelling theater with song to

### Aztec

By James Fenton *The Daily Times Farmington Daily Times*

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AZTEC — Mythological creatures from faraway islands, deep forests and magical gardens will come to life in Aztec tonight.

Johanna and Scott Hongell-Darse, a performance duo from Albuquerque, will bring their storytelling talents to the Aztec Senior-Community Center tonight.

The couple will combine European and Indian folktales, myths and medieval ballads with Hawaiian guitar, panpipes and flutes, dance and other unexpected elements for an all-ages performance. The show is sponsored by the New Mexico Humanities Council's Chautauqua program.

"We're in a tri-cultural area," said Aztec Library program director Angela Watkins, who selected the couple. "When we can bring other cultures from afar we can experience the unexpected ways stories are told and connect with the universal truths they offer us."

Born in Finland and raised in Sweden, Johanna Hongell-Darse studied theater and mime at Jacques Lecoq theater school in Paris, studied dance for 15 years in Southern India, led a dance company in Sweden and just wrapped up the spring semester as a guest professor of classical Indian dance theory at University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

"I've been performing folktales and mythology for a long time," she said. "We've collected these stories along the way as we travel and experiment, carrying them forward in new ways and in new formats."

Hongell-Darse's grandmother was pioneer Finnish puppeteer, Mona Leo.

"I grew up around puppets," she said. "There was no other choice."

Originally from Iowa, Scott Hongell-Darse is a poet, musician, songwriter and painter. He spent 15 years in Europe as a physical therapist with over 20 dance companies, including Arthur Mitchell's Dance Theater of Harlem, the English ballet and the Royal Danish ballet.

"What we do is a little unusual - a combination of theater storytelling song and dance," Johanna Hongell-Darse said. "For example, one story, a folktale theater piece from Italy, 'The Rosemary Plant,' is a transformation tale little kiddies love with plenty of humor for adults as well."

Together they have performed at more than 300 storytelling festivals.

"We've picked up bits and pieces from different cultures," Scott Hongell-Darse said. "It's showing people the similarities in so many far flung cultures, using atmospheric music and themes that we create to enhance the experience."

The couple uses various effects to share stories from around the world, some in costume, with guitars, flute and assorted woodwinds.

"In East Indian philosophy there's something called rasas (a Sanskrit term for the emotional theme of a work of art or experience), which produce different emotions between audience and performer," Scott Hongell-Darse said. "You have to be very open to them, but very much work with that dynamic in our performances."

Featuring heroes, villains and mysterious creatures from the islands in the Baltic Sea, India, Finland, Siberia, Scandinavia and France, the performance repertoire includes "Katarina and Her Destiny," a tale in which the heroine's life is forever altered by an otherwise unremarkable item - a ball of red yarn.

"Each time you perform the story you learn new things from them," Johanna said. "It's powerful how from that exchange you see how people react to certain points of each story. It's a process - and fun."

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