

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Meg Sarachan and Katie Budris

Tapping into Joy

by Lynn Matluck Brooks

Looking to put a smile on your face these glum days? I have a suggestion: watch the Philadelphia-based [Lady Hoofers Tap Ensemble's](#) #HoofersAtHome series. Posted more-or-less weekly, these short videos are accessible through the Lady Hoofers' [Facebook](#) page, [Instagram](#) account, or [YouTube](#) channel.

To keep the Lady Hoofers performing during these shelter-at-home weeks, managing director Katie Budris, along with ensemble dancer and videographer Meg Sarachan, hatched a delightful plan: select a song each week, encourage each dancer to tape herself improvising to that music at home (kitchen, backyard, bedroom, basement...), and from their work, edit together a short, cheery videodance. What they've come up with takes us to three states (Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey), catches the occasional toddler or kitty loping through the frame, and reveals these women keeping tap alive in yet one more time of struggle.

One more time of struggle, indeed. Tap dancing emerged from the [interplay of traditional dances](#) of people, primarily African and Irish, who saw centuries of oppression and struggle—centuries when making and sounding rhythms in music and dance were among the very few forms of permitted release, expression, and identity. For us now, these few months of house-bound confinement allow us far less range of motion and expression than we've previously taken for granted, while the severity of illness and the tragedy of death threaten us all. Tap has something to say to us right now.

The first #HoofersAtHome video, "[Put on a Happy Face](#)," appeared March 20. In the course of two minutes, we see 16 dancers (by my count) shuffling, clicking, rolling, flapping, scuffing, [and more](#) in the small spaces available to them. Some are lucky to have portable tap boards at home to dance on, while others make do with whatever floor they're willing to scuff up. No one can locomote very far, of course, but tap can do a lot with dancing in place—a metaphor to take to heart in these times. As befits the selected song, the assembled clips capture smiles, a few giggles, and some light, upward-bounding steps in spots. Many shots catch a dancer's legs and

feet only, giving us close-ups of shoes—black, white, red, beige—against blank walls, bedroom furniture, backyard vistas, or in one clever choice, a stockpile of toilet paper.

Released on March 27, “[Good as Hell](#)” reveals many of the same dancers and locations as the previous video, with a couple of new ones. A bewildered toddler, familiar from video #1, appears briefly as mom dances in front of the laundry set-up; also returning for video #2 are the tapping red shoes (my personal faves). One ambitious dancer lays herself down on the floor, where her camera is placed, and turns her grinning face to the lens as she mouths the lyrics right at us. Fun!

Video #3, “[Don’t Worry, Be Happy](#)” (April 3), takes a new turn. Here, the dancers contribute rhythms not only with their feet, but with finger-snaps, clapping, drumming (on a sauce pan, an empty coffee can, the floor, shoe-bottoms), tapping blocks together, clicking a loud ballpoint pen, even playing a set of tablas (with a decidedly not-happy face on that performer). We also get a screen divided into three panels, revealing an ever-rotating set of trios contributing their multiple rhythms to the perky music.



Photo: Meg Sarachan and Katie Budris

The Lady Hoofers are heading toward their tenth anniversary this fall, when they will perform at the Suzanne Roberts Theatre on South Broad Street, featuring a premiere by Philadelphia native [Robyn Watson](#). That show should have opened on May 16, so the disappointment of postponement (to the fall) weighed heavily on directors Budris and Kat Richter, as well as on the Ensemble's First Company and Apprentice Dancers. The current weekly infusion of joyful tap-on-screen keeps dancers' and viewers' excitement percolating for the company's scheduled autumn performances.

Looking ahead as I write, #HoofersAtHome will include, according to their press release, “a tribute to the late Ellis Marsalis, a lighthearted nod to *Singin' in the Rain*, and a chance for the ensemble's high-school aged Apprentices to don their prom gowns and show their stuff.” I'll be there—smiling in sync with their joyful rhythms.

#HoofersAtHome, Lady Hoofers Tap Ensemble, [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#).

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