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Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Sa'Mantha Sayten

The Shim Sham Shimmy for a Holiday Win

by Emilee Lord

The [Lady Hoofers Tap Ensemble's](#) annual THE TAPCRACKER is online this year, an “at Home” performance brought to us on demand. The work honors the years the show has been live and brings some holiday cheer into our living rooms while featuring an impressive array of percussive dance stylings and improvisational prowess.

The Lady Hoofers began in 2011 at the [Philadelphia Fringe Festival](#) and have worked to build education outreach in North Philadelphia, and a youth apprentice program along with their core company of professional dancers. It has been their mission to stay connected to the improvisational roots of tap dance and to blend in new choreographic practice. As with all performance-makers during this time, they are finding ways to stay active and relevant while they wait for theaters to reopen.

THE TAPCRACKER at Home is a showcase of selected audience and dancer favorites from the full-length version, punctuated by interviews with company choreographers and dancers. These conversations discuss the making of THE TAPCRACKER and the inspiration behind the specific pieces they highlight. The story, veering off from the original tall tale, is set in Paris where a rat infestation threatens to take over the city of lights. Enter the Tower Guards and add a little [Duke Ellington](#) and a [Shim Sham](#) finale and what we have here is a real delight.

The creators use a mix of the original [Tchaikovsky](#) score along with Duke Ellington's jazz interpretations of “The Nutcracker Suite.” They blend the tradition of The Nutcracker ballet by using images and inspiration from the original. While the Lady Hoofers stick to tap throughout their work, particular pieces like “Waltz of the Snowballs” add ballet arms and turns. The playfulness of a snowball fight and the percussion of feet is layered into the original Tchaikovsky music. One of the great parts of watching this piece is seeing where and how the choreographer, Meg Sarachan, used the traditional score. Other blends of old and new show up in the Tower Guards' arms which bend at the elbows like stiff doll soldiers. The battle between the Tower Guards and the Mouse Queen is choreographed to be character driven more than intricate, while the grimaces and exaggerated slow motion swings kept the performance comical.

One of the things I have always loved about tap is the way the upper body seems to press in to and accent the heavy footwork. There was something visible in the company dancers upper body expression and faces that convinced me they were truly enjoying the dances. Three numbers that are most readable in this online format are the "March of the Tower Guard," "Coffee," and "Dance of the Floreadores." The dancers execute these pieces with clarity and ease and are a pleasure to watch. "March of the Tower Guard" is all percussive dance and no music, highlighting the technique of the group and ending in a flashy solo performed by Rickia Dallam. "Coffee" blended jazz moves and layered tap sounds on an otherwise quiet score. "Dance of the Floreadores" went full tap jazz roots, complete with suspenders and top hats.

The online platform did seem to mute the range of possibilities available to percussive dance, from explosive showstoppers to subtle play. However, I am certain of two things. First, this all women ensemble is a powerhouse of technique, joy, and passion, and second, I will definitely be going to their live show next year.

[The TAPCRACKER At Home](#), Lady Hoofers Tap Ensemble, Dec. 18-23.

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