

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Bill Hebert

The Many Ventures of the Lady Hoofers

by Whitney Weinstein

The Lady Hoofers Holiday Concert 2016 sold out in only two weeks, but that's no surprise with a first company, apprentices, and youth ensemble totaling 36 tappers. I'd heard of the Lady Hoofers, and understood they had a respectable level of technique and artistry, but had never witnessed them.

The Lady Hoofers have class. They've got cool and creativity. These women can click a fierce heel and throw a tender, thoughtful glance in the same moment. They also showed audiences that tap is not their only strength, especially in pieces like *Waltz of the Snowballs*, where ballet technique met the tippity of tap in a playful snowball fight.

The a cappella piece *March of the Toy Soldiers* featured percussive complexities made solely with the trample and tread of toes. A brigade of many feet united in what sounded like one set of taps, impelling a collective exuberance. Rhythms from the striking, clapping, cheering, and stomping linked everyone in the room, like an invitation for accord with one's neighbors. As the cadence built, so did the audience's enthusiasm. We hollered with joy and pride, celebrating the strengths and capacities of the dancers, and feeding the energy onstage.

The youth ensemble was featured in *Squeak*, a tale of little mice with swinging tails, and *Sugar Rush*, where chefs in striped tights stirred bowls and marched with spoons and candy canes. These dances offered brightness, both figuratively and literally.

Not only is the all-female group skilled in performance, but they reach beyond the stage and into the community to better the city and its inhabitants, especially its youth. According to their website, the Hoofers' outreach residency program has provided tap classes and

shoes to 300 North Philly students. Their weekly company class at Performance Garage, their new home base, is open to advanced tappers, at a drop-in rate. Along with the Lady Hoofers' more formal performances—like this past year's fourth annual holiday show; *On Tap*, their first annual concert coming in May 2017; and an anticipated *Tap-cracker* next December—they also offer free performances and scholarships to younger dancers in their mentorship program. They have even ventured into film, earning an award for [*Dollar: A Rhythm Tap Short Film*](#) in theTrans(m)it International Film Festival 2016.

By the conclusion of the Holiday show, when the choreography and red costumes began to approach uninflected familiarity, an improvisational jam between the dancers and onstage musicians rekindled my interest. It was here that their talent could truly be discerned. A rhythmic exchange between instrumental melodies and quick steps had my body buzzing with the warm sincerity of the holidays. The Lady Hoofers have a talent for fostering constructive and propitious relationships within the theater and throughout Philadelphia in a way that emulates their passion for tap.

Holiday Concert 2016, The Lady Hoofers Tap Ensemble, Performance Garage, Dec. 9-10, <http://www.ladyhoofers.org/upcoming-performances.html>

By Whitney Weinstein
February 2, 2017