



A New Tradition

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Published On: Dec 02 2011 05:04:37 PM CST



ast year when I [Li Chiao-Ping Dance's *The Knotcracker*](#), I mentioned hoping that the production would become a holiday tradition. I got my wish as the production returned last night to Overture Center's Promenade Hall.

The Knotcracker combines dance and theater to share the story of Little Miss Steps, a girl who eagerly but futilely tries to fit in. **Liz Sexe** returns to play her, and brings an openness and innocence to the role. She's in turns curious and observant, bold and then timid, as she travels through diverse scenes, meets different characters and strives to find where she belongs.

Several highlights from last year remain—the slightly frightening group of dancers clad in black costumes who reject Miss Steps, the funny, frenzied girls doing yoga to "Flight of the Bumblebee," the water-squirting "Aqueducks" and a guest artist from [Cycropia Aerial Dance](#).

But new high points emerge, too. A dancer cleaning the floor during intermission quickly started the second half of the program when she handed the mop to Sexe and performed like a speed skater to Aaron Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man." **Rachel Krinsky** is fantastic in this scene, and elsewhere throughout the performance, such as when she and **Nicole Roerick** join Sexe and **Li Chiao-Ping** in a forceful scene set to Yid Vicious' "Nokh a Gleyzl Vayn."

It's always a joy to watch Li. She's strong and captivating and sets off the dancers with which she shares the stage. And it's a pleasure to see what a diverse production she's created with *The Knotcracker*.

The production feels more nuanced this year. Perhaps having a bit of familiarity with it allows the viewer to take in the quieter details, pick up the more subtle movements, better appreciate the beautiful moments.

Li writes in the program notes that creating *The Knotcracker* nearly two years ago led her on a journey of "trying to figure out how to find my self inside of this world, where conformity is valued." Ultimately, the lesson is that being oneself is more of a comfort than being accepted by a group.

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But the production takes the idea a step further. Li also writes, "Wrapped up in this program meant to delight and entertain is a wish for mutual respect and acceptance of differences." She puts the notion into practice by casting not only trained dancers but also community dancers and members of the **Zhong Yi Kung Fu Association**, all of whom come together in the finale.

If you haven't yet seen the production—or even if you have last year—treat yourself to this contemporary holiday tradition in the making.

The Knotcracker runs through December 4. For more information, visit overturecenter.com.

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