



Rockettes kick up magic for the holidays

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The *Footprints* application on my smart phone only told part of the story.

Indeed, my exact location was West 51st Street and Avenue of the Americas in New York City. Coordinates in precise longitude and latitude were also duly noted. The tiny Manhattan map registered on my phone even indicated the building I was in, Radio City Music Hall. What it couldn't possibly tell me was the amount of pure joy, exhilaration, and magic I was about to witness in experiencing this year's *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*.

Spectacular is a term that can easily be lent to hyperbole. In describing the renowned Rockettes and the annual holiday extravaganza however, it is not superlative enough. Audience members young and young at heart literally thrill and cheer at the inventive staging, brilliant and glamorous costuming, sparkling choreography and technological wizardry that have come to define this production.

Since its opening in 1933, the annual show has become the gold-standard in holiday entertainment and a quintessential New York City Christmastime experience. With over 200 performances during its eight-week run from November through December, and as many as six performances per day, the show is seen by more than one million people – more than all other Broadway shows combined for the entire year.

Taking full advantage of the largest indoor stage in the world, the *Christmas Spectacular* executes flawlessly in a very large way, magically leaving audience members feeling like they are up close and intimate despite the grandeur and majesty of the enormous 5000+ seating of Radio City Music Hall. When an elevator lift (one of four) hoists the entire 36-member orchestra from the pit to 13 feet above the main stage for the opening prologue, the audience senses they are in for a treat – and are not disappointed during the following 90 nonstop minutes of theatrical confection, *how-do-they-do-that* wonder, and just plain fun.

The opening *Sleigh Ride* song-and-dance number depicts the world-famous Rockettes as Santa's reindeer in a polished, high-kicking North Pole rouser that leads into the 3-D animated flight from the top of the world to New York City. Audience members use the special viewing glasses (provided) to accompany Santa and the high-stepping reindeer on a wild ride that includes near misses of airborne Canadian geese, stray snowballs, basketballs, and pucks flying out of nearby Madison Square Garden.

Finally reaching the stage, Santa brings up the curtain for the Rockettes, who launch into a phenomenal tap version of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. Three dozen women, seemingly identical in height – an illusion accomplished in the dance line by placing the tallest dancers in the center and arranging them by height progressively down the line – perform exuberant and intricate dance numbers with their taps coordinated to the beat of the music. It's a spectacle that cannot be overstated. These women simply do not miss a beat, ever.

One secret to the show's success and longevity is using scenes from past years' performances and annually incorporating new scenes or adaptations. This keeps the show fresh and strikes a happy mid-ground for those who've experienced the show before and uninitiated first-timers. Worried about missing the signature *Parade of the Wooden Soldiers* number? Don't fret, it is still gloriously orchestrated, complete with the costumes that were originally designed by the legendary film director (and costume designer) Vincent Minnelli for their debut at radio City in 1933.

Whether you believe in Santa Claus or not, the *Here Comes Santa Claus* scene is the evening's show stopper, revealing the magic behind how one man can be everywhere at once. This number combines a jazzy *Here Comes Santa Claus* arrangement with playful choreography and an LED backdrop that lends to the illusion of an endless sea of Santa's rocking to the beat. The precision involved in matching dancers with their electronic counterparts is truly amazing.

The show's penultimate *Living Nativity* is complete with live camels and sheep and the *Joy to the World* finale caps a special evening with appropriate splendor.

This show will leave even the hardcore Humbugs tapping their feet and smiling as they leave the theater. They may, for just a moment, believe in the magic of Santa Claus.



