

GOODSPEED MUSICALS

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS



**THOROUGHLY
MODERN**
Millie



MICHAEL GENNARO
Executive Director

presents

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE

Book by
RICHARD MORRIS and DICK SCANLAN

New Music by
JEANINE TESORI

New Lyrics by
DICK SCANLAN

Original Story and Screenplay by
RICHARD MORRIS for the Universal pictures film

Scenic Design by
PAUL TATE dePOO III

Costume Design by
GREGORY GALE

Lighting Design by
ROB DENTON

Wig & Hair Design by
MARK ADAM RAMPMEYER

Assistant Music Director
WILLIAM J. THOMAS

Orchestrations by
DAN DeLANGE

Sound Design by
JAY HILTON

Orchestrations by
DAN DeLANGE

Production Manager
R. GLEN GRUSMARK

Production Stage Manager
BRADLEY G. SPACHMAN

Casting by
STUART/WHITLEY PAUL HARDT

Associate Producer
BOB ALWINE

Line Producer
DONNA LYNN COOPER HILTON

Music Direction by
MICHAEL O'FLAHERTY

Directed & Choreographed by
DENIS JONES

APRIL 21 - JULY 2, 2017
THE GOODSPEED

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IN MUSICAL THEATRE

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SHOW SYNOPSIS

THE CHARACTERS

MILLIE DILLMOUNT: A Salina, Kansas native in New York City determined to live the life of a modern young woman in 1922. She wears her hair bobbed, follows the latest fashion trends, and plans to find a job quickly and marry her boss.

JIMMY SMITH: A young, streetwise New Yorker who revels in his bachelorhood. Jimmy lives spontaneously, and he encourages Millie to do the same.

MRS. MEERS: The manager of The Hotel Priscilla with a sordid past in show business and crime.

MISS DOROTHY BROWN: One of Millie's fellow residents at The Hotel Priscilla. Though an orphan, Miss Dorothy comes from a wealthy upbringing and wants to learn how to "survive on a dime."

CHING HO: An immigrant from China who, with his brother Bun Foo, is determined to save enough money working for Mrs. Meers to bring their mother to the United States from China. Ching Ho grapples with the ethics of their line of work.

BUN FOO: Like his brother Ching Ho, Bun Foo works for Mrs. Meers in the hope of sending for his mother in China. He is willing to do Meers' dirty work in order to achieve his goal of reuniting his family.

MISS FLANNERY: The head secretary at Sincere Trust Insurance Company, where Millie gets a job. She is not a "modern."

MR. TREVOR GRAYDON: The head of Sincere Trust Insurance Company and the object of Millie's grand plan to marry her boss.

MUZZY VAN HOSSMERE: A popular singer who helps Millie learn to follow her heart.

RUTH, GLORIA, RITA, ALICE, CORA, LUCILLE, ETHEL: Actresses who live at The Hotel Priscilla with Millie and Miss Dorothy.

The underlined terms are defined in the glossary on page 16. The terms in red are defined in the margin.

It is 1922, and Millie Dillmount of Salina, Kansas just arrived in Manhattan for the first time. She is determined to live the life of a "modern" – complete with the bobbed haircut, shorter skirts, and rouge on her cheeks – and will not be deterred. When she meets a streetwise New Yorker named Jimmy, he sends her to The Hotel Priscilla, a **boardinghouse** for girls, with some advice: go home to Kansas. Millie has her mind made up, however, and she heads to The Hotel Priscilla ready to start a new life.

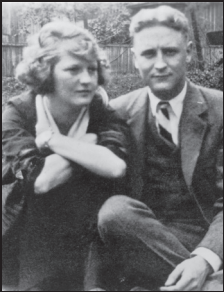
After a week at The Hotel Priscilla and endlessly searching for a job, Millie is almost out of options when she meets Miss Dorothy Brown from California. Miss Dorothy comes from a wealthy family and has moved to Manhattan to learn "how the other half lives" without all the privileges of her affluent upbringing. That's when Millie reveals to Miss Dorothy her modern woman plan: she will marry her boss! That she does not yet have a boss is inconsequential to her. Once she gets a job, she will set about wooing her eligible employer. In the laundry room of The Hotel Priscilla, Mrs. Meers schemes with her minions, brothers Ching Ho and Bun Foo, to kidnap Miss Dorothy! Ching Ho and Bun Foo are from China, and they work for Mrs. Meers in order to save enough money to send for their mother in Hong Kong. Even though the work is criminal, the brothers are hopeful it will help them reunite with their mother.

Millie finally lands an interview with a promising, single boss: Mr. Trevor Graydon of Sincere Trust Insurance Company. Though the receptionist, Miss Flannery, is less than impressed by her modern appearance and attitude. Millie passes Mr. Graydon's "Speed Test" with flying colors, and she earns a job as a **stenographer** in Trevor's office. Then, she sets about working her way into his heart. To celebrate, Millie, Miss Dorothy, and the rest of the girls at The Hotel Priscilla hit the town that night, but finding a place to get a drink during **Prohibition** proves more difficult than they thought. So, they seek the help of the first person they see: Jimmy! After some convincing, Jimmy helps them into a nearby **speakeasy**. Their fun is cut short, however, when the police arrive.

As they wait at the police station, Jimmy tells Millie about his spontaneous way of life, jumping from one job to another as the mood strikes him, a stark contrast to Millie's ideal man. When they are released the next morning, Jimmy asks Millie to coffee and then a Yankee game. She declines both and tells Jimmy that she is going to marry her boss. Millie's mind is made up, and she will stick to her plan. Back at The Hotel Priscilla, Mrs. Meers continues to plot Miss Dorothy's kidnapping with Ching Ho and Bun Foo, even though neither wants to follow through with her schemes. Mrs. Meers plays her hand, though, reminding the brothers about their deal: "One mama in exchange for services rendered."

A few weeks pass, and the girls at the boardinghouse point out that Millie has been spending an awful lot of time with Jimmy for having her sights set on Mr. Graydon. Even so, Millie is thrilled to tell them that this time, instead of the typical Coney Island trip or visit to an underground speakeasy, Jimmy is taking her to "the glamorous penthouse of Muzzy Van Hossmere!" Muzzy, a popular singer, has just returned from a world tour, and Jimmy managed an invitation to her welcome home party. Muzzy's party is elegant, and some

PEOPLE TO KNOW



F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

was an author who achieved great fame in the 1920s for his novels and short stories about flappers and the social elite of the time. He is also credited with coining the phrase "Jazz Age" to describe

the twenties. His wife, **ZELDA**, a southern belle from Montgomery, Alabama, was the primary influence for Scott's female characters, and he often quoted her and her letters to him in his stories. The pair rose to fame and fortune quickly and became icons of the era. Zelda was also a dancer, writer, and painter in her own right, though she never achieved the acclaim that her husband did.



GEORGE AND IRA GERSHWIN

are the songwriting duo perhaps most closely associated with the Jazz Age. The brothers wrote musicals like: *Lady, Be Good!*; *Strike Up the Band*; *Porgy and Bess*

and *Let 'Em Eat Cake*. George also achieved success with concert works, his most famous being "Rhapsody in Blue."



DOROTHY PARKER

was a poet, reviewer, and editor for major publications such as *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*. She is known for her cynical, yet humorous, tone and biting satire in the popular style

of the flappers of the era. As W. Somerset Maugham wrote in his introduction to [The Portable Dorothy Parker](#): "She seems to carry a hammer in her handbag to hit the appropriate nail on the head. She has a rare quickness of mind."

of the biggest celebrities are in attendance: **F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald**, **George and Ira Gershwin**, and **Dorothy Parker**, to name a few. Out on the terrace, however, Millie and Jimmy argue about her pursuit of her boss, Mr. Trevor Graydon. The argument ends when Jimmy kisses her, and Millie is left weighing her feelings for Jimmy against her plan to be a modern woman who marries not for love but, rather, to improve her station. Her decision is made easier, though, when she sees Jimmy leave Miss Dorothy's room that night at The Hotel Priscilla.

At Sincere Trust Insurance Company, Millie is in a rut: she has sworn off Jimmy in favor of her original plan to marry Mr. Graydon, but Trevor is impervious to Millie's advances. When Miss Dorothy stops by the office, however, Mr. Trevor Graydon is immediately taken with her. Before she knows it, Millie is helping Trevor plan his date for that night... with Miss Dorothy! Just when things could not get worse for Millie, Jimmy shows up on her window ledge, determined to get her back. She finally agrees to have dinner with him that night. However, when their dinner ends with them washing dishes in the restaurant's kitchen to make up for what they could not pay, she second guesses her decision. Luckily, Muzzy Van Hossmere is there to remind her to follow her heart, because that is what marriage is all about, after all.

Running to find Jimmy, Millie instead encounters Mr. Graydon, who is distraught after Miss Dorothy stood him up for their date. Trevor reports that when he went to look for her at The Hotel Priscilla, Mrs. Meers told him that Miss Dorothy had checked out and left no forwarding address. Millie, Mr. Graydon, Jimmy, and Muzzy know Miss Dorothy would not leave without telling them, and they quickly realize that Mrs. Meers is responsible for her mysterious disappearance. They then devise a ruse to expose Mrs. Meers and her kidnapping scheme. Fortunately, Ching Ho, who has fallen madly in love with Miss Dorothy, is one step ahead of them, and he hides Miss Dorothy from Meers, winning her affection in the process.

With help from her friends and her speedy stenography skills, Millie exposes Mrs. Meers' true identity: Daisy Crumpler, a criminal who has been hiding in plain sight behind an alias. Jimmy and Miss Dorothy also reveal their secret; they are Muzzy Van Hossmere's stepchildren! Muzzy, in an effort to teach her stepchildren about the real world and true love, sent them out into the city with \$25 each to make their own ways without their father's fortune and name behind them. Millie learns that not only is Jimmy the brother of her best friend, but he is also the first vice president of Van Hossmere World Enterprises, the company that owns Mr. Graydon's Sincere Trust Insurance Company. Jimmy asks Millie to marry him, and she agrees, not because he is her boss, but because she has finally fallen in love.



Dick Scanlan



Jeanine Tesori. © Rodolfo Martinez

RICHARD MORRIS (*Book*) is best known as the author of the original screenplay for the film *Thoroughly Modern Millie* that starred Carol Channing and Julie Andrews, which earned him a Writers Guild Award for best American musical in 1967, and as the book writer of the stage musical *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* (1960). A film adaptation of *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* was released in 1964 starring the late Debbie Reynolds. Before his successes on Broadway, Richard Morris wrote screenplays for motion pictures and for television series. As a staff writer for Universal Studios, Mr. Morris wrote the screenplays for *Finders Keepers* (1951) and *Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair* (1952). In the mid-fifties he penned episodes of *Private Secretary* with Ann Southern, and in 1955 he was named head writer as well as director of *The Loretta Young Show*, for which Morris received an Emmy nomination. In his early life, Richard Morris served in the special services division of the United States Army during World War II, attended the Choinard Art Institute in Los Angeles and the Neighborhood Playhouse in Manhattan where he studied acting under Sanford Meisner, and wrote sketch comedy for emerging performers in the late 1940s. Born in Burlingame in 1924, Morris spent most of his life in California, passing away on April 27, 1996 in Los Angeles. He and Dick Scanlan had recently completed their collaboration on the book for the now-hit musical *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

DICK SCANLAN (*Book & New Lyrics*) is known for his work on Broadway as the co-author of *Everyday Rapture* (Tony, Drama Desk, and Lucille Lortel Award nominations) with Sherie Rene Scott and *Thoroughly Modern Millie*; he also worked with Berry Gordy as Script Consultant on *Motown the Musical*. Off-Broadway, Scanlan co-wrote and co-directed *Whorl Inside a Loop* at Second Stage; directed *Little Shop of Horrors* starring Jake Gyllenhaal, Taran Killam, and Ellen Greene; and originated the role of Miss Great Plains in *Pageant*. In 2014, his rewrite of another Richard Morris work, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, had its first production at the Denver Center for Performing Arts. Prior to his work in the theatre, Dick Scanlan was an accomplished writer, with numerous articles and essays featured in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The Village Voice*, and he served as editor-in-chief of *POZ* magazine. His short fiction has also appeared in myriad journals and magazines, as well as the inaugural edition of *Best American Gay Fiction* (1996). In 1995, Scanlan's critically-acclaimed novel *Does Freddy Dance* was published first in hard copy, then in paperback, by Alyson Publications.

JEANINE TESORI (*New Music*) has been nominated for Tony Awards for her work on *Twelfth Night* at Lincoln Center (Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Music in a Play); *Thoroughly Modern Millie*; *Caroline, or Change*; and *Shrek the Musical*, and she won the Tony Award for Best Original Score for *Fun Home*. As a result, she holds the most Tony nominations for composition of any female composer in history; incidentally, she is the only female composer to have garnered multiple Tony Award nominations. Tesori served as Artistic Director for Encores! Off-Center for four years, and she is the Creative Director and Co-Founder of A Broader Way, a foundation "dedicated to offering girls from urban communities an outlet for self-expression and creativity through arts-centered programs." Additionally, Jeanine composed the music for *Violet* (Obie Award, New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Musical, and Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Musical), John Guare's *A Free Man of Color*, and Bertold Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, which starred Meryl Streep in Shakespeare in the Park's 2006 season. Tesori has also written two operas; *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck* with libretto by Tony Kushner and *The Lion, the Unicorn and Me*; and she scored such films as *Nights in Rodanthe*, *Every Day*, and *You're Not You*. Originally from Port Washington, Long Island, Jeanine is a life-long pianist and graduate of Barnard College and Columbia University. Prior to her accomplished career as a composer, Tesori worked as a rehearsal pianist, pit musician, conductor, and musical arranger.

Thoroughly Modern Millie inspires me to think about my own relationship with New York City. In the opening lyrics of the show, our heroine, Millie Dillmount, arriving from Kansas, says, "I've studied all the pictures in magazines and books. I memorized the subway map, too." Growing up in California, I studied up before my arrival in so many ways, as well. The Tony Awards. The Macy's Parade. The "I Love New York" commercials (remember those?). I always knew I wanted to be a part of the great American experiment; an island that embodies the idea of the melting pot, where, as another character expresses in a lyric, "each day it's free admission for those who dream."

The 1920s were a time of enormous economic prosperity and change in our country when women shed Victorian values by not only loosening their corsets and cutting their hair but also by starting to chart their own life courses. This is the movement *Millie* wants to be a part of, and New York embodied the spirit of that movement. But life is complicated. New York is an experiment that continues to find its way, and its beating heart continues to call out to *Millies* everywhere.

Bringing the big city to the tiny Opera House stage is an exciting challenge. I've assembled a fantastic group of designers to create the Art Deco majesty of 1920s New York, and each of them has a keen understanding of how to embrace the theatre's unique spatial considerations. The set will be elaborate and every inch of space on the stage and wings will be used to contain the intricate puzzle of all its pieces. I also consider the intimacy of the space particularly exciting, given the fantastic acting company I've enlisted for the show. I know these are going to be performances that will spill out over the footlights and fill the house with vibrancy and joy!



Director Denis Jones at the first day of rehearsal for Thoroughly Modern Millie. ©Diane Sobolewski

// Bringing the big city to the tiny Opera House stage is an exciting challenge. //

BEHIND THE SCENES COSTUMES BY GREGORY GALE

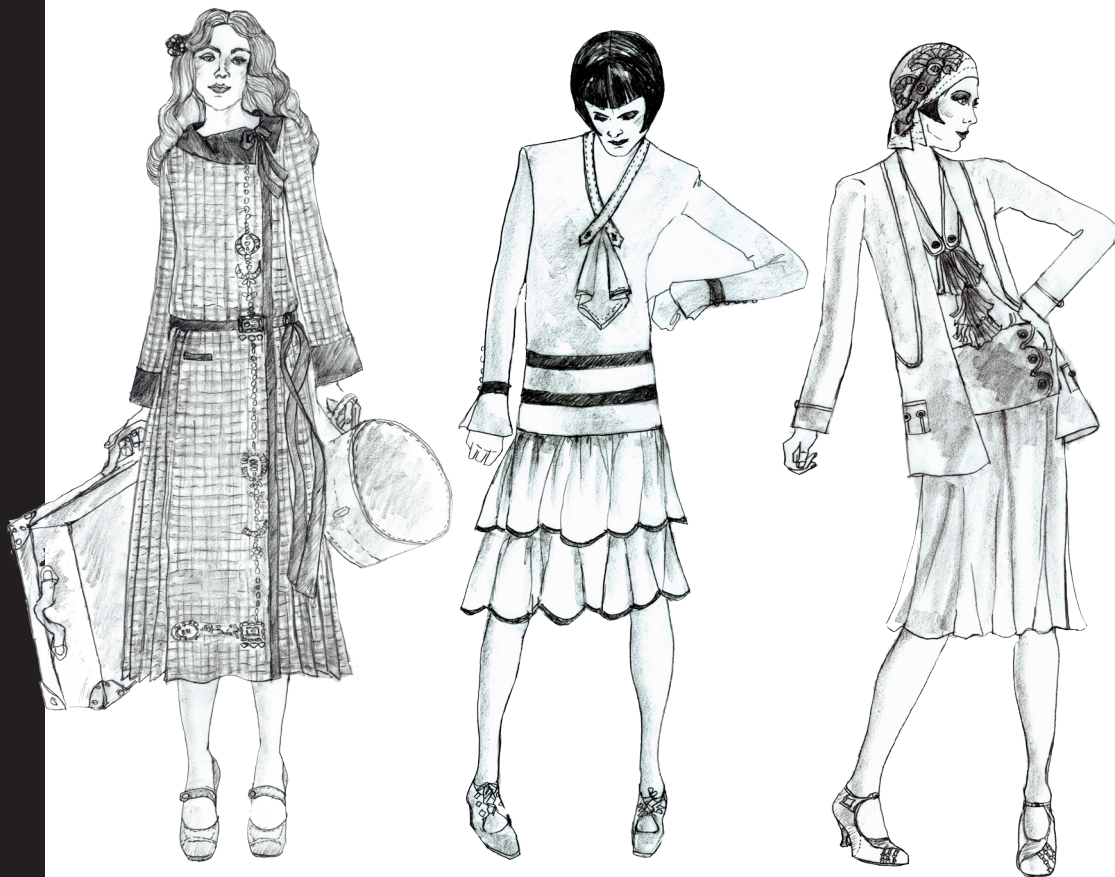
THE FLAPPER IMAGE

Flappers epitomized modernity—they were androgynous, working women who had a siren-like appeal. The flappers' image consisted of drastic changes in women's clothing and hair. Nearly every article of clothing was trimmed down and lightened in order to make movement easier.

Flappers discarded the restrictive and curve-flattering corsets they were once forced to wear. The new, energetic dances of the Jazz Age required women to move freely—something that corsets wouldn't allow. Following Coco Chanel's influence, flappers imitated the Parisian "garçonne" or "little boy" look. They preferred to be slender and would diet or bind themselves to appear thin, flat-chested, and long-limbed. Unconstructed dresses with low waists helped to mask curves. Newly bobbed hair also added to the "garçonne" image.

Flappers wore shortened skirts, daring to raise their hems at first to the ankles and eventually to the knees. Stockings made of rayon were worn starting in 1923 to show off the flappers' legs.

Accessories were an important part of the flapper look. Foreheads were usually covered by close-fitting hats, turbans, or headbands that were designed to be worn with bobbed hair. Newly bare legs were accentuated by lower-cut shoes, and stylish handbags shrunk in size. Long ropes of pearls were worn around the neck, and multiple bracelets were wrapped around wrists. Flappers also started wearing make-up, something that was previously reserved for prostitutes and actresses. They donned pale skin, bright red lips, and owl-ringed eyes.



Millie's Costume Evolution

Design by Gregory Gale





In the late 1960s, political, social, and artistic change was sweeping across the nation. Virtually everything was in flux, including popular interest in movie musicals. When the film *Thoroughly Modern Millie* was released in 1967, director George Roy Hill, producer Ross Hunter, and screenwriter Richard Morris were inspired by pastiche musicals (e.g., *The Boy Friend*) that were gaining popularity in London at the time. In the waning days of the Hollywood musical, *Millie* spoofed silent films

from the 1920s and embraced the farcical slapstick style of this bygone age. Yet, the Sexual Revolution was gradually making cheeky and irreverent films like *Thoroughly Modern Millie* less palatable to the general public. Despite this shift, the film was an undisputed success for Universal Pictures and a star vehicle for Julie Andrews. It won an Academy Award for Best Original Score and several Golden Globes, and it was the 10th highest-grossing film of 1967. Who could resist Carol Channing being shot out of a cannon?

Many years later, the stage production of *Thoroughly Modern Millie* was born from a confluence of Dick Scanlan's (book and lyrics) determination, passion, and desire to realize his potential as a writer. Since Scanlan was ill and at home more than usual in the late 1980s and early '90s, he had time to watch the campy 1967 movie musical of the same name numerous times with guests. Despite the fact that it is a light-hearted, over-the-top film, Scanlan felt a deep connection to the character of Millie and her quest to reinvent herself in New York City. As a child, he always saw the Big Apple as a place where it was possible for people to be their true selves and to achieve their dreams. Scanlan's partner had been urging him to do more writing for years, and upon his partner's death in 1988, Scanlan began planning to adapt a stage version of the show.

Scanlan contacted the screenwriter of the film, Richard Morris (book), to see if he would be interested in adapting it for the theatre. Morris rebuffed Scanlan several times, but eventually he agreed. Unfortunately, Morris passed away soon after finishing the first draft in 1996. Despite the loss of his collaborator, Scanlan was able to bring on Michael Mayer (director) and Jeanine Tesori (composer). When the film was released, it had four new numbers and eight period songs. When Scanlan and Tesori were finished with the stage version, it only retained two songs from the movie,

"Jimmy" and the title song. Many other aspects of the stage production similarly diverged from the film version.

Universal Pictures released the film at a time when racism was more institutionalized, accepted, and apparent in peoples' daily lives. The film reflected this reality. There was trepidation among the creative team about taking on a project that could offend modern audiences. In fact, Mayer was not willing to commit to the project unless he could portray the Asian characters in culturally appropriate ways. Mayer's solution was to make the Chinese henchmen fully-realized characters that are central to the plot and to have them speak Chinese. He later chose to embrace actress Harriet Harris' extreme portrayal of an Asian stereotype when she first played Mrs. Meers. The creative team realized that the opportunity to juxtapose an over-the-top Asian stereotype with authentic Asian characters would delegitimize the offensive characterization of Asian Americans. This daring theatrical choice worked and helped propel the show to greater acclaim.

A workshop of the production was scheduled to take place in 1999. It would feature Kristin Chenoweth as Millie and Broadway veteran Bea Arthur as Mrs. Meers. La Jolla Playhouse subsequently agreed to mount a fully staged production. Erin Dilly was cast in the part of Millie, but she left the company during rehearsals to play the lead role of Bertrande in the US tour of *Martin Guerre*. This led to a *42nd Street*-style scenario in which a then-unknown Sutton Foster was chosen from the ensemble to play the leading role. Foster was praised for her clarion voice, boldness, pert look, and boundless energy. Foster continued to dazzle audiences throughout the remainder of the California engagement and in the Broadway production. In fact, she earned a Tony Award, Drama Desk Award, Astaire Award, and Outer Critics Circle Award for her portrayal of Millie on Broadway.

Thoroughly Modern Millie premiered on The Great White Way at the Marquis Theatre on April 18, 2002. It received mixed reviews from critics, but it went on to win six Tony Awards and five Drama Desk Awards. Since then, it has toured in the US and twice in the UK.

Goodspeed's production of *Thoroughly Modern Millie* is directed and choreographed by Denis Jones (*Holiday Inn*, *Band Geeks!*). Jones endeavors to bring the Art Deco majesty of 1920s New York City to The Goodspeed stage while filling the space with vibrancy and joy. Like Scanlan, Jones feels intimately connected to a story about a character that strives to find her true self and achieve her dreams in New York City. We hope you enjoy this rollicking tap-happy show filled with madcap mistaken identity, the energy of the roaring twenties, and plenty of heart.

THINGS TO KNOW

Carrie Chapman Catt founded the **NATIONAL LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS** (now the League of Women Voters) in 1920 with the mission of educating the 20 million women who gained voting rights that year on fulfilling their new responsibilities as voters. The league also promoted using their new voting influence to shape public policy. Prior to founding the NLWV, Catt revitalized the National American Woman Suffrage Association and devised the 4-year lobbying campaign that ultimately secured voting rights for women. She was the only woman in the graduating class of 1880 from Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm (now Iowa State University), and in 1883 was one of the first women in the United States to be appointed superintendent of schools. Following the ratification of the 19th Amendment, Catt devoted her career to promoting equal-suffrage rights worldwide.

When *Thoroughly Modern Millie's* Millie Dillmount arrives in New York City for the first time and sets out to establish herself as a modern, working woman, it is 1922. Only two years earlier, women gained the right to vote alongside their male counterparts, and with suffrage came a social revolution that placed young women like Millie at the epicenter. This revolution, however, began years before women won the vote.

From 1914 to 1918, a vacuum in the United States industrial workforce emerged as more and more men joined the fight in World War I. During this period, women entered industrial employment in record numbers only to find that, once the war ended, they would be expected to surrender their jobs to returning soldiers and reassume their positions as homemakers. Additionally, as women struggled to balance their household duties with their careers and learned that they would not earn the same income as a man, many women elected to leave the workforce after the war ended. Post-war working women, while greater in number than before, again found themselves in historically “feminine” jobs: teacher, nurse, receptionist. Even so, the independence discovered during wartime was not forgotten, and women pushed for legislated equality. When women won the right to vote in 1920, the immediate goal of the feminist agenda of the era was achieved; legally, women had as much say in government as men did. Following this victory, shifts in gender relations were largely social in nature for the remainder of the decade.

In the 1920s young women like Millie enjoyed a new kind of liberation they had never experienced; flappers drank and smoked publicly, engaged in wild social dancing, openly discussed and read about human sexuality, followed radical fashion trends like bobbed haircuts and knee-length skirts, listened to jazz music, and adopted a trendy vocabulary all their own. Women took more control in their relationships with men; they were empowered to

make their own romantic choices and rejected the Victorian ideals of relationships and marriage held by the previous generation. In fact, to be called “Victorian” was an insult of the highest degree for the flapper. For her, what was considered taboo and private to her parents’ generation was unabashedly public. Flappers made it acceptable for women to enter and enjoy public spaces that were previously reserved exclusively for men.

Though undeniably a more liberated woman than her Victorian predecessors, the flapper image in society and literature was and still is regarded by many as frivolous, and historically it has eclipsed women of the same period who continued to advocate for the feminist political agenda after gaining the right to vote. While flappers enjoyed newfound social liberation after suffrage, there were also groups of women who continued to engage in the political sphere. Women in this decade lobbied for issues such as child welfare, voter education for women, world peace, women’s equality, labor regulations, and interracial cooperation. For the first time in the United States, federal funding for maternity and child care was provided through the Sheppard-Towner Act. New marriage and divorce laws were implemented that granted women more individual rights, and women gained citizenship independent from their husbands’ under the Cable Act. During this decade, women founded the **National League of Women Voters**, and worked to progress the agendas of the National Women’s Trade Union League and the National Consumers League, both of which were also founded by women.

Flappers like Millie and the rest of the girls at The Hotel Priscilla made important strides for women’s position in society; because of them, women gained power in the social sphere to be pioneers in fashion, relationships, in the workforce, and beyond. Alongside them, though, were women pushing for reform in the political arena and dedicated to making the country better for women and others in the long-term.



RACE, MILLIE, AND MUSICAL THEATRE

In recent musical theatre history, a trend of adapting popular films for the stage has emerged. Examples of this include *Legally Blonde*, *The Lion King*, *Bring it On*, and *Catch Me if You Can*. *Thoroughly Modern Millie* is no exception; it premiered on Broadway in 2002, but it is based on the 1967 film of the same title. One of the challenges inherent in adapting this particular film for a modern audience is its treatment of the Asian characters. Perhaps the simplest illustration of how these characters were portrayed in the film is their credits: "Oriental #1" and "Oriental #2." In the film, Ching Ho and Bun Foo did not even have names. They were, at best, hollow caricatures of what the filmmakers perceived Chinese people to be.

Co-book writer Dick Scanlan and composer Jeanine Tesori were dedicated to upending the racist stereotypes that are prevalent in the original film when crafting their approach to the stage version of the musical. In a panel discussion with the licensing organization Music Theatre International in 2016, Scanlan and Tesori outlined their thought process for the inclusion and treatment of these characters. They noted that the obvious solution to the problem would have been to eliminate the roles completely, thereby not addressing race in a story that otherwise has nothing to do with race relations. However, the issues of diverse casting and employment opportunities for Asian and Asian-American actors, or the lack thereof, in the musical theatre industry greatly influenced the writers' decision to not only include the characters of Ching Ho and Bun Foo in the show but also to humanize them and intentionally pull them out of the racist stereotype. Thus, Scanlan and Tesori created the back-story of two immigrant brothers working to provide for themselves and for their mother, and they expanded the roles Ching Ho and Bun Foo play in the action, drawing parallels between the brothers' journeys and those of Millie and Miss Dorothy as all four arrive in New York to recreate themselves.

Another glaring issue the writers had to manage was the use of **yellowface** in the film for the character of Mrs. Meers. Again, Scanlan and Tesori weighed their options: eliminate the character so as not to address the issue at all, or find a way to denounce it within the world of the story. The result was a re-imagined version of Mrs. Meers, a patently racist human trafficker with no redeeming qualities to speak of, masquerading



Beatrice Lillie as Mrs. Meers in the *Thoroughly Modern Millie* film

in yellowface as an Asian woman to conceal her identity from the police. Mrs. Meers became the villain of Scanlan and Tesori's *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and part of her villainy, particularly for a contemporary audience, is that she is a racist character. Including this version of Mrs. Meers then puts the whole show in a category with other musicals that have racist characters, and the question often becomes: does including a racist character in the action make a show racist?

This question has been asked about a number of musical theatre productions, and it has frequently led creative teams to alter scripts that include racially charged dialogue or ideas. The opening number of *Show Boat* has been rewritten to omit offensive language countless times, but its original lyrics also have been restored on occasion with the intent of forcing the audience to confront our country's ugly relationship with race. The same also happens with productions of the musical *Ragtime*, which chronicles the relationship between not only white and black communities but also immigrant communities at the turn of the century. Though the text has never been altered for a professional production, schools and amateur companies routinely (albeit, illegally) replace offensive racial slurs used by antagonistic characters with tamer language. When *South Pacific* was in out-of-town tryouts in the mid-forties, audiences pressured Rodgers and Hammerstein to eliminate the elements of the show that address race relations and to cut the song "You've Got to be Carefully Taught," in which Lt. Cable asserts that the racism expressed by the leading lady, Nellie, is a learned behavior taught through the hatred of others. To his credit, Oscar Hammerstein II vehemently refused to alter the book.

It should be noted that, like *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Show Boat*, *Ragtime*, and *South Pacific* are all based on other works; each of these musicals was adapted from a novel of the same title, and the creators of the stage versions made deliberate choices to address and denounce racism in their shows, regardless of the intent of the original work. Scanlan and Tesori's inclusion and treatment of the Chinese characters—and those appropriating the Chinese culture—in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* follows in the footsteps of these prominent works of musical theatre by acknowledging our society's issues with racism and criticizing it through their characters' journeys.



CLICK HERE
to listen to a podcast featuring a panel discussion about the issues of race, stereotypes and identity politics in the *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

Link: <https://soundcloud.com/music-theatre-intl-1/millie-conversation-jan-12-2016>

CHINESE IMMIGRATION AND EXCLUSION IN THE 20TH CENTURY

THINGS TO KNOW

LENGTHY HOLDING PERIOD:

From 1910 to 1940, Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, California was the primary immigration station for the tens of thousands of Asian immigrants who sought entrance to the United States under the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The island was chosen based primarily on its isolated location in the middle of the water; it would prevent detainees from communicating with the outside world. The facility was also virtually escape-proof. People, most of whom were from China, were held at Angel Island and treated as prisoners while they awaited hearings with immigration officials that would determine their entry status. This holding period often lasted months, if not years.

When we first meet Ching Ho and Bun Foo in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, they are in the laundry room of The Hotel Priscilla receiving orders from Mrs. Meers to kidnap one of the girls from the boardinghouse and send her to China. We quickly learn that the brothers do Mrs. Meers' dirty work in hopes of earning enough money to bring their mother to the United States from Hong Kong. Even though Ching Ho and Bun Foo know what they are doing is criminal, they seem stuck and out of options. The unfortunate truth is that in the United States many Chinese immigrants in the early twentieth century found themselves doing **indentured** work like farming, mining, and cleaning and had few—if any—other options.

In the 1920s, it was extremely difficult for Chinese citizens to move to the United States because of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which remained in effect until 1943, though some of the practices persisted through the mid-fifties. This piece of legislation was introduced and revised multiple times with the ultimate goal of eliminating Chinese immigration to the U.S. In fact, after the bill's signing, the Exclusion Act slowed emigration from China to the United States by roughly eighty-five percent. But, why was this bill introduced in the first place?

While the **Gold Rush** raged in the western part of the United States in the mid-1800s, the **Qing Dynasty** in China began its slow decline. With an unsteady government and economic uncertainty in their own country, many Chinese citizens traveled to the United States as migrant workers, mining in gold fields for a wage. Shortly thereafter, industry in the United States grew exponentially while the situation in China worsened, and many of these migrant workers remained in the country and gained employment in factories. However, when the US economy dipped in the 1870s, American politicians and union leaders were quick to blame the influx of Chinese laborers for depressed wages and pit American workers against them. Ultimately, anti-Chinese sentiment grew to the point that legislators called for total exclusion of immigrants from China. Still, many Chinese citizens persisted, hoping they would be one of the lucky few to pass US immigration officers' intense

interrogation—often lasting several days following a **lengthy holding period**—and enter the United States to start a new life.

As the Qing Dynasty continued its slow decline, the Chinese government faced many obstacles to maintaining order, including numerous invasions from foreign powers like Great Britain and Japan during the **Opium Wars** and **Sino-Japanese War**, respectively. These invasions cast doubt among Chinese citizens about the stability of their government and military, which resulted in a revolution that forever changed the political landscape of China. In 1911, an event that came to be known as The Wuchang Uprising launched the Chinese Revolution—the Xinhai Revolution in China—that followed. The revolutionaries could be divided generally into two camps: those who supported a **constitutional monarchy** and those who proposed a **republican government**. As the Qing court negotiated the institution of a constitutional monarchy with one faction of revolutionaries and named Yuan Shikai the **premier**, **provinces** around the country pledged themselves to the Revolutionary Alliance, which advocated for republican government. The leader of the Revolutionary Alliance, Sun Yat-sen, then struck a deal with Yuan which guaranteed him the position of president once he agreed to the formation of a republic. Unfortunately, Yuan died in 1916, leaving a power vacuum at the apex of China's nascent republican government, and a period of **warlordism** ensued. Centralized government was not fully reestablished until 1928.

With so many political changes and upheavals in a short period of time, many Chinese citizens like Ching Ho, Bun Foo, and their mother sought avenues out of the chaos. In fact, it is estimated that between 1850 and 1940, upwards of six million people left Hong Kong alone, not including the various other international ports in China. Ching Ho and Bun Foo spend most of *Thoroughly Modern Millie* under Mrs. Meers' thumb, victims of their circumstance in a country that actively seeks to exclude them. However, by the finale of this story, there is light at the end of the tunnel for the two brothers in the form of new friendships, love, and a family reunited.



Sutton Foster as Millie on Broadway

- Sutton Foster, who originated the role of Millie Dillmount at La Jolla Playhouse and on Broadway, was far from the first actress considered in the role. In fact, she took over the role at La Jolla only two weeks before opening night.
- Richard Morris, the late author of the screenplay for the 1967 film *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, had been approached several times by musical theatre writers hoping to adapt the film for the stage. Only when Dick Scanlan pitched his ideas for the show and persisted over the course of five years did Morris concede, and the two agreed to co-author the book for the hit Broadway musical.
- *Thoroughly Modern Millie* was nominated for 11 Tony Awards in 2002, taking home 6 including the award for Best Musical.
- Morris and Scanlan originally intended to use primarily jazz standards from the twenties, a few numbers from the original movie, and perhaps one original new song for the musical. However, when they teamed up with Jeanine Tesori as composer, new character-driven songs and lively dance numbers took over, and now the show is comprised of mostly original material. The two numbers from the movie that remain are the title song and "Jimmy."
- Whoopi Goldberg was one of the original producers of *Thoroughly Modern Millie* when it premiered at La Jolla Playhouse in San Diego, California.
- The original film *Thoroughly Modern Millie* starred Julie Andrews as Millie, Mary Tyler Moore as Miss Dorothy, and Carol Channing as Muzzy Van Hossmere. At one point in the film, Channing is launched from a cannon.
- Mary Tyler Moore had an uncredited singing voice-double in the film.
- At one point during *Thoroughly Modern Millie's* development, the creative team asked producer Stewart F. Lane to purchase a working elevator for the set design. It cost around \$350,000 and was eventually cut. Because it moved so slowly, it pushed the show's run time beyond three hours!



CLICK HERE to watch the elevator dance from the *Thoroughly Modern Millie* film

Link: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2h208_thoroughly-modern-millie-1967-eleva_news

Listed in alphabetical order

BOARDINGHOUSE: a lodging house at which meals are provided.

CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY: a system of government in which a monarch (a person who reigns over a kingdom or empire) shares power with a constitutionally organized government. The monarch may be the de facto head of state or a purely ceremonial leader. The constitution allocates the rest of the government's power to the legislature and judiciary. Britain became a constitutional monarchy under the Whigs; other constitutional monarchies include Belgium, Cambodia, Jordan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Thailand.

GOLD RUSH: a situation in which many people go quickly to a place where gold has been discovered because they hope to find more gold and become rich.

INDENTURED: bound by an official document to work for another person for a specified time especially in return for payment of travel expenses and maintenance.

OPIUM WARS: two armed conflicts in China in the mid-19th century between the forces of Western countries and of the Qing dynasty. The first Opium War (1839–42) was fought between China and Britain, and the second Opium War (1856–60), also known as the Arrow War or the Anglo-French War in China, was fought by Britain and France against China. In each case the foreign powers were victorious and gained commercial privileges and legal and territorial concessions in China. The conflicts marked the start of the era of unequal treaties and other inroads on Qing sovereignty that helped weaken and ultimately topple the dynasty in favor of republican China in the early 20th century.

PREMIER: first in position, rank, or importance.

PROHIBITION: the period of time from 1920 to 1933 in the U.S. when it was illegal to make or sell alcohol.

PROVINCES: large parts that some countries are divided into, each having a government of its own.

QING DYNASTY: the last of the imperial dynasties of China, spanning the years 1644 to 1911/12. Under the Qing the territory of the empire grew to triple its size under the preceding Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the population grew from some 150 million to 450 million, and an integrated national economy was established.

REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT: a form of government in which a state is ruled by representatives of the citizen body. Modern republics are founded on the idea that sovereignty rests with the people. The term may also be applied to any form of government in which the head of state is not a hereditary monarch.

SINO-JAPANESE WAR: (1894–95), conflict between Japan and China that marked the emergence of Japan as a major world power and demonstrated the weakness of the Chinese empire. The war grew out of conflict between the two countries for supremacy in Korea. Korea had long been China's most important client state, but its strategic location opposite the Japanese islands and its natural resources of coal and iron attracted Japan's interest. In 1875 Japan, which had begun to adopt Western technology, forced Korea to open itself to foreign, especially Japanese, trade and to declare itself independent from China in its foreign relations.

SPEAKEASY: a place where alcoholic beverages are illegally sold; specifically during Prohibition in the U.S.

STENOGRAPHER: a person whose job is to write down the words that someone says by using a special type of writing called shorthand.

UNION LEADERS: the heads of organizations of workers formed to protect the rights and interests of its members.

WARLORDISM: when a leader of a military group who is not officially recognized fights against other leaders, groups, or governments.

YELLOWFACE: Makeup used by a non-East Asian performer playing the role of an East Asian person.

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