



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.