Musical Theater: Thoroughly Modern Millie

Grades 9-12
Thursday, December 9, 2004 • 11 a.m.-12 p.m. ET

When viewing Musical Theater: Thoroughly Modern Millie and participating in this guide’s suggested activities, the following National Standards for Music (4, 6, 8 and 9) and Theater (1, 2 and 3) will be addressed.

Students Will See and Hear…
The creators of the Broadway hit Thoroughly Modern Millie talk about their collaboration and singers perform musical selections from the 2002 Tony Award® winner for Best Musical. Songwriting duo Dick Scanlan (book and lyrics) and Jeanine Tesori (music) explain how the show evolved from a 1967 movie into a successful musical. Scanlan and Tesori are interviewed by Michael Kerker, Director of Musical Theater at ASCAP, The American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers. Kerker asks them about the process of adapting a movie into a play. The team also comments on why they chose to work in musical theater, and offers advice on how others can pursue a career in musical theater today.

Curriculum Connections:
Thoroughly Modern Millie correlates with the following curricula: Music, Social Studies/History, Language Arts, and Theater

Educational Objectives
• To identify musical styles and genres, and understand how songs reflect a unique cultural moment
• To examine the relationship between a specific historical period and the art that attempts to reflect that period
• To understand multiple perspectives of diverse cultural groups and the cultural art form they share with their communities
• To understand the process of adapting one art form (film) into another art form (musical theater)

Program Notes
Musical Theater and Millie
With Broadway celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2004, students hear a first-hand account of how to create a musical. Musical theater is a uniquely American invention that developed out of the various entertainments found on vaudeville stages and music halls at the beginning of the 20th century. Audiences would see a skit, a song, a dance, and then a stand-up comedian telling jokes. The only problem was, none of the pieces were related. Eventually, producers began looking for a story to unite all the pieces. Then this story was put to song, and the songs and dances were integrated with plot and character. Words, music, and movement were essential extensions of the play’s themes. Good musical theater required versatile performers who could do it all—sing, dance, and act. Thoroughly Modern Millie is an example of the kind of play that defines musical theater today. Set in the 1920s, Millie is the story of a young girl’s dream to escape the humdrum world of her small town in Kansas for the excitement of New York City. Her dream is to become a “modern woman” or “flapper,” while also finding a rich and successful husband. The play is considered a satire, capturing the comic adventures of this “fish out of water.”

Creating and Collaborating
Musicals are written and developed in many ways. Musical theater writers, composers, and lyricists are sometimes inspired by events in daily life, personal experiences, or famous stories. Thoroughly Modern Millie was first a movie
musical, featuring Julie Andrews as Millie. Decades later, fiction writer, theater critic, and lyricist Dick Scanlan decided to adapt the movie version to the musical theater stage. Scanlan wrote the "book," or script, as well as the lyrics to the new songs. With the help of composer, musician, and arranger Jeanine Tesori, Thoroughly Modern Millie was transformed into a stage musical. Their collaboration opened on Broadway in 2002 and went on to win six Tony Awards®, Broadway’s greatest honor, including Best Musical. Its music and songs were also nominated for a Tony Award®.

The Adaptation Process
Adapting a movie or a story into a musical or play is not an easy process. In the case of Thoroughly Modern Millie, Dick Scanlan and Jeanine Tesori were not afraid to rework someone else’s creative material. One of their toughest choices was to cut some of the original songs from the movie and write new songs for the stage production. In order to tell the story the way he wanted, Scanlan felt he needed to add these new songs.

A Career in Musical Theater
The lights on Broadway can be seen reflected in the eyes of many young, aspiring actors, playwrights, dancers, and musicians. Although it may seem glamorous, the road there is long, hard, and very curvy. So why do so many take the journey? What does it take to pack your bags?

Internet Resources:
For more information, visit:
modernmillie.com
ascap.com
pbs.org/previews/broadway/

This program is presented in cooperation with ASCAP.

Resources related to Musical Theater: Thoroughly Modern Millie can be found on page 20.
For additional resources, visit kennedy-center.org/pwtv