

Camille A. Brown Taps Into a Thoroughly Modern Millie

by Reanne Rodrigues



Millie Dumont’s story signals new and exciting possibilities for women and immigrants in America. A small-town girl, Millie arrives in New York at the dawn of the Jazz Age in pursuit of a better life. Her grand plan is to find a job and marry a wealthy man. However, things don’t go according to plan and what ensues is a great adventure. Along the way, Millie discovers that reinventing herself as a “thoroughly modern” individual is harder than it seems.

Dick Scanlan and Jeanine Tesori’s *Thoroughly Modern Millie* might be set in a bygone era, but City Center’s *Encores!* revival reconceives this Tony Award-winning Best Musical and defeats stereotypes to give the show a fresh perspective. Featuring Ashley Park (*Grand Horizons*, *Mean Girls*) as Millie, the dynamic artistic team is led by incoming *Encores!* Artistic Director Lear deBessonet in collaboration with playwright and creative consultant Lauren Yee, and one of Broadway’s most sought-after choreographers, Camille A. Brown (*Encores! Cabin in the Sky*; *For Colored Girls*).

Millie’s jazz-kissed adventures are told in large part through music and movement. In high-spirited showstopping tunes like “Forget About the Boy” and “Gimme Gimme”—revitalized by The *Encores!* Orchestra—Millie and her friends are led through tap-happy dance moves created by Brown.

Much like Millie, Brown’s professional journey has been about perseverance and self-discovery. “I fear challenges but still welcome them,” said Brown. “That’s exactly why I decided to undertake this project. It’s an opportunity to show another side of myself—a more rhythmic side that I find really exciting to tap (corny pun intended) into.”

The roaring twenties of Millie’s time are synonymous with an array of iconic dance

styles and Brown spent a lot of her time researching them. “I’m riffing on some of the social dances and forms during that time—the Charleston, Lindy hop, Jitterbug, Shorty George, black bottom, and shimmy—all combined with my personal style,” she said. Audiences can expect to revel in this rhythmic feast of dynamic choreography and live music reinvigorated by some of the world’s tap dance headliners—Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, Derick K. Grant, and Jason Samuels Smith. “To be on stage with three of these masterful artists is a dream. I feel a real speed test coming on,” said Brown.

“A new heroine for the modern day”

Although Brown’s focus is on energizing the show’s bright-as-a-penny tone, she sees *Thoroughly Modern Millie* as an opportunity to convey her own social message: “I hope audiences hear my voice through the dance and know that black girls can choreograph ‘classic’ Broadway too.”

Dealing with a moment in history when the ground was shifting in terms of gender roles and race, Millie’s energy, hope, and ambition establishes her as a new heroine for the modern day. *Encores! Thoroughly Modern Millie* offers a raise-the-roof tribute to the indomitable spirit of New York and the diverse people who call it home.

Encores! Thoroughly Modern Millie runs May 6 – 10 at New York City Center. For more information, visit NYCityCenter.org

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