

Play Review: Thoroughly Modern Millie Great Display of Talented Youth

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By Christina Henderson

Cold snowy days and a dreary economy call for uplifting entertainment. For a fun escape, come to the Escanaba High School Fine Arts Department's spectacular production of *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

The curtain opens on a steely blue Manhattan skyline circa 1922, where sassy young Millie from Kansas (Chantell LaForest) hops off the train determined to bob her hair, shorten her skirt, and marry a wealthy boss. Dressed in yellow like a burst of country sun, Millie's hopes ring high in a crowd of 51 gray-clad city dwellers dancing a quick-stepping Charleston in perfect precision.

One of the great strengths of the EHS performers and their talented directors Lynn Soderberg and John Beck, is their ability to create lavish spectacles with the company. Kudos to choreographers Dianne Duvall and Laura Robinson, costumer Ellanie Ferarri with Anna Ambrose, technical director Jim Soderberg, and a dedicated crew for pulling off such a tremendous performance.

When that first breathtaking scene unfolded, this reviewer got a lump in her throat and tears in her eyes. Perhaps I'm sentimental, but there is something deeply moving about a community of talented young people and adult leaders pouring their energy into an event executed with such skill and artistry.

Other great company numbers include "The Speed Test" – a type-writing, tongue-twisting, tap-dancing dictation song featuring the astonishingly-fast Dylan VanDrese as Millie's boss – and a riotous speakeasy dance number with wonderful performances by featured dancers Jeanie Soper and Jason LaFave.

Chris Ogren stars as Millie's wisecracking love interest, Jimmy Smith. Ogren and LaForest are wonderfully matched, both delivering their lines with amazing stage presence and quick repartee. Ogren's Jimmy shines on the ballads, and Millie melts your heart with her big eyes and big voice on "Gimme Gimme."

Laughs come a mile a minute, most notably from the delightfully sinister Mrs. Meers (Danielle Leisner) and her two Chinese sidekicks, Ching Ho (Jordan Beck) and Bun Foo (Logan Mutch). Leisner is a great actress playing a great actress, two-faced and brassy with an evil grin you have to love. Beck and Mutch show an astounding talent for comedy and memorized all their songs and lines in Mandarin Chinese. The duo actually wrote the sketches delivered during scene changes themselves, a fact you'd never guess because they are so very funny and blend seamlessly with the show.

Tory Wood lights up the stage with her smile as Miss Dorothy, hitting high notes you won't believe. And Teegan Ferrari fills the house with her star-power and beautiful voice as the big-time entertainer, Muzzy Van Hossmere.

Thoroughly Modern Millie is a girl, and a show, that will capture your heart from the moment the curtain opens, and won't let go until it's closed.

Additional performances are Nov. 24, & 25 at 8:00pm, at the Escanaba High School Auditorium. Tickets are on sale in the EHS Activities Office or at the door.