

South Valley

Millie takes Manhattan

SVCT's 'Thoroughly Modern Millie' charms audiences

<http://southvalley.com/millie-takes-manhattan/>

March 5, 2018 [Susan RifeTheater](#)

In two years of seeing shows staged by South Valley Community Theatre, I've been pleasantly surprised by the talent displayed by local actors, with some of the best demonstrated by teenagers.

This opinion was confirmed by the current production of *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, the company's annual teen musical. From the title role, vivaciously played by Brianna Pember, down through the hapless Bun Foo and Ching Ho (Thanachai Kapinkan and Emily Pember), director Janell Cummings has drawn a terrific cast to animate this charming story about a wide-eyed young woman from Kansas who heads off to New York City.

Millie Dillmount shows up in Manhattan in 1922 with a firm plan: Find a job as a secretary to a wealthy businessman and then marry him. It wouldn't be a musical if things didn't go wrong from the first, with Millie shortly divested of her handbag, hat, scarf and one shoe in the rough and tumble of city life. She takes a room at a grubby hotel where the landlady has sinister connections to the white slave trade, and her new boss shows no sign of proposing marriage.

Brianna Pember's Millie is sassy and funny, and although Millie might be a bit naïve, she's no country bumpkin. It takes her just half of the title song for her to ditch the country ensemble and long curls for a snazzy red flapper-style dress, cloche hat and bobbed haircut.

Pember is thoroughly comfortable as Millie. On opening night, her lovely singing voice was a bit overmatched by the live 15-piece orchestra, but she makes up for a lack of volume with her full embrace of the role.



EMERALDS Muzzy (Mia Veltri) explaining green glass love to Millie (Brianna Pember) in 'Thoroughly Modern Millie.'
Photo: Elizabeth Mandel

Newcomer Roberto Nolasco is a perfect foil to Pember as Jimmy Smith. He's got a relaxed, easy style as a penniless young man who's streetwise until he quite literally falls for Millie. His "What Do I Need with Love?" is poignant and sweet.

Millie gets some great support from her new friends in New York, specifically Melodie Knapp as Miss Dorothy Brown. Pember and Knapp's voices merge nicely on "How the Other Half Lives."

Stealing virtually every scene she's in is Lucy Kaelin as the dastardly Mrs. Meers, who pretends to be a friendly Chinese landlady to young women at her hotel, but then conspires to sell them into slavery. Kaelin gets the deadpan delivery of "Sad to be All Alone in the World" when she learns a new tenant is an orphan just right, and her funny renditions of "They Don't Know" and "Muqin" are show stoppers.

Alan Chipman leads a solid pit orchestra, and costume designs by Michelle Griffin, Alicia Corso and Adrienne Wilkinson are spot on.

Andrew Cummings' elaborate set captures the nuances of 1920s New York City but on opening night was slow and cumbersome in the set changes.

Curtains Up Theater Review by Camille Bounds: SVCT “Thoroughly Modern Millie” is a frothy, silly, musical romp

Morgan Hill Life by Camille Bounds | Feb 28, 2018

<http://morganhilllife.com/2018/02/28/curtains-up-theater-review-by-camille-bounds-svct-thoroughly-modern-millie-is-a-frothy-silly-musical-romp/>

Teen Musical is based on 1967 movie starring Julie Andrews

South Valley Civic Theatre’s teen musical show “Thoroughly Modern Millie” has its roots in the wacky 1967 Oscar-winning movie starring Julie Andrews. It was reworked and juggled around into a sparkling musical that entertains. “Millie” walked off with six Tony Awards in 2002, including Best Musical.

This “Millie” has a talented energetic cast, creative choreography and some musical help from Victor Herbert, Gilbert and Sullivan, and Al Jolson. At least 110 glittering costumes by costume designers Michelle Griffin, Alicia Corso and Adrienne Wilkinson give the production a



Photo by Marty Cheek

classy “Roaring ‘20s” look and feel. And let’s not forget the at least 20 detailed scene sets by designer Andrew Cumming. His ingenious eye for design creates a theatrical miracle in the small space that is allowed on the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse stage

Brianna Pember plays Millie, the optimistically, naive hick newly arrived from Kansas who decides to shuck her small town image and immerse herself in the flashy Manhattan ‘20s by bobbing her hair, raising her skirts and marrying her boss. The Live Oak High School senior has the voice and comedic flair and is most enjoyable to watch. She is unstinting with her energy and belts out the vocals with a solid flair. The show stealers are Emily Pember, as Chin Ho, and Thanachai Kapinkan, as Bun Foo, who play laundry workers and Mrs. Meers’ henchmen. They belt out old standards in Chinese. Their version of Al Jolsen’s “Mammy” in authentic Cantonese is a hoot and delivered with superb gusto.

Miss Dorothy (Melodie Knappe) and Trevor Graydon (Ben Snook) are hysterical fun with Victor Herbert’s “I’m Falling In Love With Someone” number. Mrs. Meers (Lucy Kaelin) the nefarious, con artist, pseudo dragon lady proprietor of the Priscilla Hotel, takes the most juicy comedy role in the show and mugs her way through with good timing.

Muzzy Van Hossmere (Mia Vetri), the grande dame mentor for Millie, keeps the plot connected with humor and fun. An appealing Roberto Nolasco sings and dances as Millie’s boyfriend, Jimmy Smith. Director Janell Cummings keeps her actors moving at a fast pace. Nathan Cummings’ lighting, Christine Carrillo and Liana Kishi’s choreography, and the wonderful teen dancers show some of the brightest spots in this extravaganza. The typewriter number is clever and well done.

Alan Chipman conducts a talented orchestra that becomes the fine glue that holds the show together. After all is said and done, perhaps “Thoroughly Modern Millie” is just what we need at this time. Something fluffy, fun and a reminder that silly innocence and a good laugh is good for us.

'Millie' charms

Morgan Hill Times

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Katie Bell is a young woman trying to make it in New York, in South Valley Civic Theatre's upcoming production of 'Thoroughly Modern Millie,' opening Friday, Feb. 23 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. Photo by Elizabeth Mandel

When a small-town girl, determined to make a new life for herself, comes to the Big Apple, she discovers life is more complicated than she first thought.

South Valley Civic Theatre's portrayal of Thoroughly Modern Millie starring Live Oak High School senior Brianna Pember as "Millie Dillmount" offers a fun, uplifting look at a young, modern woman coming of age.

"It's a complicated story about love, coming into your own, and figuring out what you want out of life," says producer Marianne Snook. "It's like you have a list, but your list changes when you open your eyes and see all of the other possibilities."

Like many of the playhouses' performances, this musical includes many seasoned actors, orchestral accompaniment and a top-notch set design, which Snook says are on par with Broadway.

"The whole setting will draw you into the story," Snook says of Andrew Cummings high-quality set designs.

In the end, Snook says when people think they are looking back upon "simpler times," people are really dealing with the same issues we are now: "Where does work fit in? Where does money fit into your life? Who do you know? What's truly important? If I just find a rich man, my life is going to be complete."

But, it's a lot more than that, Snook says.

"It's about who makes you happy. It's friends and family that are there to support you. And, all of those things that were important in the '20s are still important now."

South Valley Civic Theatre presents 'Thoroughly Modern Millie.' Performances run Feb. 23-March 17 at Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road, Morgan Hill. For tickets, call (408) 842-7469 or visit svct.org.

South Valley

A knack for theater

<http://southvalley.com/thoroughly-modern-millie-south-valley-civic-theatre/>

Three young women take the stage in SVCT's 'Thoroughly Modern Millie'

February 14, 2018 Susan Rife



THEATER KIDS The cast of South Valley Civic Theatre's upcoming 'Thoroughly Modern Millie,' prepare for their performance, opening Feb. 23. Photo by Jason Leong

Community theaters, and theatrical troupes of all stripes, pride themselves on creating strong, family-like bonds among cast and crew and especially of developing new generations of talent. South Valley Civic Theatre, which presents a children's show, a teen show and at least one show each season with multiple roles for young people, even includes it as part of its mission statement: "We believe that involvement in community theater is an important means for youth to develop confidence and skills and for adults to support the youth of our community."

That commitment may be more apparent in the theater company's next show, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, which opens on Feb. 23. Three of the key female roles in the show, including the title role, are played by Live Oak High School seniors who literally grew up in the theater. The show's director, Janell Cummings, shepherded her four sons through productions at church, SVCT and Live Oak.

Brianna Pember, Katie Bell and Becca Reynolds make up a triumvirate of homegrown talent on the *Thoroughly Modern Millie* set. All three are seniors at Live Oak, and all are 17 years old. They've been on stage, together and apart, for many years.

"Millie," the story of a young woman from Kansas who heads to New York City in 1922 with plans to marry for money, not for love, will be their last community theater show together, a fact that reduces them to speechlessness and tearful giggles.

Reynolds, who plays Gloria in the musical, has been on the SVCT stage since she was not quite 5 years old and her mother, Joy, was playing Rooster's girlfriend in a production of *Annie*, that show that has hooked many a young girl into musical theater.

"I've been surrounded by theater my whole life," she said.

Brianna Pember, who will play the part of Millie Dillmount, arrived on the stage in fourth grade, as Fairgoer No. 3 in a production of *Charlotte's Web*. When she began taking singing lessons, she discovered that she had the ability to make people feel emotions deeply through her voice ("and face," chimed in Bell). She was hooked for good when she played Fiona in "Shrek! The Musical," her first starring role.

"I felt like people believed in me and my passion was validated," she said.

Bell, playing Miss Flannery in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, is the relative latecomer to the local theater scene, lured in by her older brother, who had played Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*. She joined Pember in *Shrek* and last fall was Mrs. Webb in *Our Town*.

"It was overwhelming, how accepting everyone is," said Bell, who was bullied as a younger child but found that theater gave her confidence and a voice.

"When you come here, you get more confidence. You learn to listen to yourself," she said.

Of the three, just Pember is planning to study acting in college. She has her hopes pinned on the esteemed theater program at the University of Michigan, although she has applications out to 17 schools. Bell is looking at an international business major and French minor, while Reynolds will study biology with an eye toward becoming a pediatrician.

The impending end of high school for the three is one reason Cummings is directing the show. "Becca is just a couple years younger than my younger son," she said. "Becca and Nathan have done shows since a very young age. Brianna, I've watched her from third grade on up, and watched her blossom and continue to improve her craft."

The combination of graduation of the Live Oak girls and the show itself made directing it an easy "yes" for Cummings and a must see for audiences.

‘Thoroughly Modern Millie’ teen show coming to SVCT stage

Musical comedy tells story of a small-town girl finding love and independence

<http://morganhilllife.com/2018/02/14/thoroughly-modern-millie-teen-show-coming-to-svct-stage/>

by [Marty Cheek](#) | Feb 14, 2018

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Photos by Chris Foster

Brianna Pember plays the title role of Millie in the South Valley Civic Theatre’s teen musical “Thoroughly Modern Millie.” The show opens Feb. 23 and showcases the acting, singing and dancing talent of young people from throughout the South Valley.

It’s 1922 and American women have had the right to vote for only three years. In the South Valley Civic Theatre’s teen show “Thoroughly Modern Millie,” a young woman arrives in New York City of the Roaring ‘20s and discovers her independence and intelligence through luck and pluck.

Opening Feb. 23, the musical stars Live Oak High School senior Brianna Pember as “Millie Dillmount.” With big ambitions, she leaves her hometown of Salina, Kan., and finds herself in the Big Apple with two suitcases of clothing and a dream to find a rich man to marry. Through her comical adventures, Millie bobs her hair and takes on the attire of a flapper, eventually finding out that a modern woman doesn’t need a man to make her happy.

“Millie is this girl who dreams of making it big and having a bigger and better lifestyle,” Pember said. “She moves all the way to New York City with no plan. Throughout

the show, she faces some obstacles, and her original goal is flipped around, and her life is turned upside down when she meets Jimmy who becomes the love of her life and something she never knew she needed.”

Played by Roberto Nolasco, Jimmy Smith is a paperclip salesman who is popular with young women. At first Millie thinks she wants to marry Trevor Graydon, played by Ben Snook, the owner of Sincere Trust Insurance Company where she finds a job working as his stenographer. Millie delights in her new independence and big city lifestyle. But she faces danger when she checks into a hotel owned by the leader of a white slavery ring. Based on a 1967 movie of the same title, “Thoroughly Modern Millie” opened on Broadway on April 18, 2002, and won six Tony Awards, including Best Musical.

Pember plans to go to college after graduation this June. She has applied to various universities to study her passion, musical theater. Performing as the lead in “Thoroughly Modern Millie” has helped her better understand how far women’s rights have come in the past 100 years, she said. Women’s social status started transforming after they gained suffrage. The economic recovery in the aftermath of the world war that

ended Nov. 11, 1918, also changed American culture as the nation had to adapt to women's increasing equality as they entered careers.

"Before the flappers came out, the women were married off," Pember said. "That was a time where they were expected to have babies and reproduce and take care of your family. The 1920s came around and women started changing it up. They started not conforming to social standards anymore."

Women in the Jazz Age cut their hair into bobs styles and began wearing high heels with glitzy short skirts. Young women shocked traditional social viewpoints by wearing excessive makeup, smoking, driving automobiles, drinking cocktails and treating sex in a casual manner. They started to really take their lives in their own hands with the loosening up of social standards, Pember said. The dramatic changes opened doors to more opportunities for women.

"The flappers really started everything that we have now," Pember said. "We had a woman run for president in 2016, which definitely wouldn't happen, like, a long time ago. The women were emerging out of the shadows into the spotlight."

Throughout the show, Millie demonstrates that a woman who uses her wits can survive in a big city, she said.

"She is very smart. She's really street savvy and picks up on all the lingo in New York City very quickly," she said. "She ends up getting a job on the first week she arrives as a stenographer for a big company. Her ultimate goal is to marry her boss, the owner of the company, so that she can have money and a comfortable lifestyle."



Falling in love with Jimmy, Millie eventually learns that marriage should not be just to have financial security and a comfortable life, she said.

"She realizes she doesn't need to depend on a man for wealth and happiness," she said. "She needs to follow her heart and go for what she wants."

The male characters also have transformed with the Jazz Age times, Pember said.

"Trevor Graydon is, like, this really big boss of this huge successful company and he has a lot of female employees working for him," she said. "He's, like, very blunt and he has high expectations of them, which is good. He talks about how this job is an opportunity where women can go straight up in the work field."

Trevor dates Millie's best friend, an actress from California named Miss Dorothy Brown, played by Melodie Knappe. He talks to her about being kind and gentle to women instead of dominant of their lives, Pember said. Early in the show, Jimmy is a "player," a shallow young man who lives his life on whim and wits. When he meets Millie, he is drawn to her larger-than-life personality. He ultimately falls in love with her because of her independence and her dreams, she said.

"This show a lot of fun. I love the cast so much," Pember said. "I feel like I can go up and talk to anybody because we're super close. The audience is going to love this musical for the great music and dances. It's a real feel-good show."



SVCT From Thailand to the Theater

Thanachi Kapinkan is your normal, average, every-day teenager in many ways. He goes to high school and listens to music and Facebooks with his friends. But Thanachi is here in Gilroy as an exchange student from Thailand. He is 17 years old and normally lives in his home town of Songkhla in Thailand. Songkhla is a large coastal city with a population of roughly 75,000 residents, a very prosperous fishing town and also a major port of trade in the region.

Thanachi chose to come to the United States for his senior year abroad so he could improve his learning of the English language and to be able to see America. He is very excited to be able to experience all of the culture and places to see in California.

Thanachi will also get to experience his first stage performance here in America. He was encouraged by one of the production staff for SVCT's "Thoroughly Modern Millie" when he attended "Follies" at SVCT in October and he landed a part. Aside from doing some small dance performing for local festivals in his home town he has never been in a play or performed in front of an audience before, so he will be making his singing and acting debut in Morgan Hill.