

**DEPARTMENT OF FINE & PERFORMING ARTS
NEWTON NORTH HIGH SCHOOL**

March 17, 2014

Dear Newton North Community,

We want to thank many of you for attending this past weekend's production of *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. We are so proud of our student's performance and what they have learned throughout this process. As a teaching and working theatre our goal is not just to produce plays, but educate our students and staff throughout every production process. It is also always thrilling to watch the success of our students both on and off stage throughout a production.

This production of *Millie* has generated a robust, and sometimes very difficult but educational conversation in our community. We truly value this as well as the honest feedback we have received. As planned early on in our process we invite you to a "talk back" tonight, Monday March 17th, at 7:00PM in the Newton North Auditorium. We hope you will join us to learn more about the play and continue an open and honest conversation and further learn and share perspectives surrounding the arts and stereotypes, especially those presented in *Millie*.

We will entertain questions and discuss the recent concerns surrounding Newton North's production of *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. It is important to acknowledge up front that we recognize the concerns that have been brought forward. We appreciate the open and honest dialogue and hope that the information in this letter will help us all understand the work that has gone into this production and the teaching and learning that will continue long after this weekend.

In choosing *Thoroughly Modern Millie* for production we recognized early on that there are some significant challenges in regard to the stereotypes portrayed in the show. We ultimately decided to produce the work, but took deliberate steps to address these concerns directly from the onset:

- Michele Leong, Director of the Human Rights Office and Charlene Beh, English Teacher at Newton North have been a helpful resource to the faculty, staff, and students involved in this production. They led the cast/crew in workshops about the stereotypes portrayed in the musical. They also were instrumental in educating the staff and students on Asian Stereotypes in the media and its impact on our society. Ms. Beh also attended a rehearsal and gave helpful feedback to the production staff. They also provided resources about Asian stereotypes that are available on the Theater Ink Website.
- The students in the Asian Culture Club at North had a conversation with the director, producer and department head in which they voiced some of their concerns and suggestions.
- We reached out to Music Theatre International, the company that owns the rights to *Millie* to see if a high school edition was available. Unfortunately, it was not

and although we did explore changes to the script we knew in the end this was not possible due to our contract/agreement with MTI. From our agreement: “Any changes violate the authors’ rights under federal copyright law. Without prior permission from MTI, your actions may subject you to liability - not only to the authors, but also to us - for breaching the terms of your license agreement, which clearly forbids you to make any changes or deletions.”

- Our Director worked with the cast daily making sure the characters in question were developed with integrity and care throughout the process while understanding the issues they presented.
- The program includes a Production note that addresses the concerns surrounding Asian stereotypes. That note is attached.
- Adam Brown, Director of Theatre Ink, in his opening words to the audience at each production made a statement about the stereotypes in *Millie* and invited the audience to read the production note, as well as invited them to our talk back on March 17th at 7:00PM.

We do understand that we did not anticipate the magnitude of feelings that the play would elicit. Even as educated artists and teachers we also learn and grow in situations like this. Future selections will go through more scrutiny and we will look at issues with a keener eye. We do apologize for the impact that this has caused and may cause members of our community.

Even with these steps in place, we acknowledge that for some it may not be enough. It is our sincere hope that this production is one of both artistic integrity and one where significant learning has occurred. It certainly was never and is never our intent to offend members of our school or Newton community.

Theatre Ink prides itself on being “Newton North’s Teaching and Working Theatre.” The process of producing this show, and the thoughtful and sometimes challenging dialogue it has generated among staff, students, and the broader Newton community, exemplifies the program’s commitment to explore, critique, and interpret how the human experience is conveyed through the arts. As the curtain went up this past weekend we brought the constructive conversation and learning process that our school community has engaged in over these past few months to an audience of students, parents, and community members. We hope that you will choose to participate in it with the same appetite for learning that we have seen in our students – a genuine desire to understand our differences, our history, and ourselves.

Thank you, as always, for being our partners in this process. We hope to see you this evening.

Sincerely,

Todd R. Young
Chair, NNHS FPA Department

Adam Brown
Director, Theatre Ink

Jennifer Price
Principal