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**Shapely gams and jazz hands:  
taming Ann Miller's virtuosic body in and around 'Prehistoric Man'**

Ann Miller's appearance as Claire Huddesen in *On The Town* (d. Kelly/Donen, 1949) is typical of her casting in Hollywood musicals; a featured speciality role designed primarily to exploit Miller's own star persona as one of the fastest tappers in the business, whose legs were insured for a million dollars. Miller's association with the black form of tap and her energetic physical and vocal performance style formed the basis of both her appeal to casting executives and her disruption of typical constructions of white femininity – explaining her frequent appearance as vamp or comedienne, rather than romantic lead. These performances frequently incorporate musical signifiers of 'non-white' ethnicity and deviant gendered identity to further codify Miller's presence as liminal, fetishizing the physical strength and virtuosity of her star image in a way that aims to commodify and contain it.

*On The Town's* 'Prehistoric Man' can be understood as both an echo of Miller's earlier roles and a prototype for later appearances. Via the racist presentation of the 'prehistoric' masculinity that Claire seeks as non-white, primitive, and forceful, the number constructs her previous agency, independence, and intelligence as a mask for an underlying feminine subservience. It is this shift that permits Claire's showstopping song and dance, containing its articulation of desire within a non-white textual space that is also used to deal with the problem of her unruly femininity. In a move typical of the Hollywood musical's simultaneous promotion and effacement of the star text, this elision and subsequent repositioning of difference takes place on two levels: the assimilation of Claire into the film's wider community, and the exploitation and containment of the presence of Miller herself.