

Review: 'Little Women: The Musical'

David Rooney

JANUARY 23, 2005 | 09:00PM PT

It's hard not to love the March girls of Concord, Mass., so deeply etched are Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy on the cultural and emotional landscape that they resurface from generation to generation like cherished friends. That built-in affection is fortunate, then, for "Little Women: The Musical," a pleasant but staid revisitation that's too leisurely in locating the heart of the material. But the producers of this unapologetically old-fashioned tuner have secured an appealing, capable cast whose conviction and energy help bolster the mostly unmemorable songs.

A correction was made to this article on Jan. 25, 2005.

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Review: The M. J. L.

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Louisa May Alcott's autobiographical story of growing up during and after the Civil War in a house dominated by women was ripe for a musical makeover, its themes of sisterhood and female empowerment providing an automatic connect for women of all ages. Feisty aspiring writer Jo March — who maintains fierce loyalty and love for her family while refusing the constricting role laid out for women at that time — seems a tailor-made figure to captain a musical, inviting anthemic power ballads about making one's mark in life.

Sentiments I hope to tap into.

As Jo, Sutton Foster diligently conveys that spirit and has at least one of those songs in uplifting act-one closer "Astonishing." But the deficiencies in Allan Knee's book keep her one-dimensional until well into act two, when her family suffers a loss.

Finally some praise for "Astonishing"!

The first weakness comes with the opening. Instead of properly introducing Jo and establishing her deep bond with her sisters, the show begins in New York, after she has left home, prematurely detouring into enactment of the blood-and-guts tales of violence and production Jo is trying to get published.

— Hadn't thought of this criticism.

Musically, the opening feels untidy, offering fragments of songs — "An Operatic Tragedy," "Better" — before the first number that feels even halfway complete, "Our Finest Dreams." It's the first time the March sisters are seen together as themselves, contemplating Christmas as in chapter one of the novel.

— Perhaps we can use this criticism to build up the final reveal of the sisters all together.

Thereafter, the familiar story and characters start to kick in, given an assist by Maureen McGovern as the girls' devoted mother. Marmee's wistful song to her husband away at war, "Here Alone," provides one of a handful of emotional peaks in the bland score (played by a period-appropriate ~~all-acoustic orchestra~~ by composer Jason Howard and lyricist Mindi Dickstein, both new to mainstream musicals).

any chance to spice it up?

The action faithfully follows key events of the book and adheres to its character descriptions: Jo is a galumphing tomboy with a powerful creative urge; Meg (Jenny Powers) a prim romantic; Beth (Megan McGinnis), a sweet, fragile girl, who even before her illness lives vicariously through Jo; and Amy (Amy McAlexander), a tantrum-prone brat with a yen for sophisticated living, who flits off to Europe with starchy Aunt March (Janet Carroll) and finds romance with Jo's castoff, Laurie (Danny Gurwin).

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Despite engagingly performed musical numbers like Laurie's overture of friendship to Jo, "Take a Chance on Me," or his enrollment as a de facto sibling, "Five Forever," the first act drags. *They really like Laurie*

Director Susan H. Schulman (absent from Broadway since 1998's "The Sound of Music" revival) gets the job done, but while it's all amiable and tasteful enough, it's a little wan and not entirely absorbing.

Second act summons more depth of feeling, notably during "Some Things Are Meant to Be," a touching, melancholy duet that cements the love between Jo and Beth during the latter's Cape Cod convalescence. The song gracefully articulates Beth's serenity about a life only half-lived.

I certainly agree that this moment is a powerful one.

The decision to play the story's major tragedy offstage robs the musical of its most powerful emotional moment. But in McGovern's stirring, vocally resplendent interpretation, Marmee's song "Days of Plenty," in which she conveys her grief and her fortitude to her children's disappearance.

VARIETY

Mercifully toning down her chronic perkiness from "Thoroughly Modern Millie,"

Foster confirms herself an accomplished musical performer, finding the humor in Jo's social ineptitude and lack of pretense. While she sounds more Middle American than New Englander, her Jo is plucky and likable, and her numbers charmingly sung. Foster is backed, down the line, by a tight, talented ensemble, with notable work from Gurwin and McGinnis.

Despite its low-tech quaintness — a kite is whisked quickly offstage rather than making it fly; rainstorms are sans rain — the production is designed with some sophistication by Derek McLane, in particular Jo's vast attic sanctuary. With the exception of the Marches' living room, a cluttered conceptual mess, the sets are crisply conceived, employing elements like a garden trellis, ornate drapes or the beamed attic roof to create frames within the proscenium. This device works with the painted backdrops to give a not inappropriate bookish feel.

— certainly something to be mindful of.

The show's handsome upholstery extends to Catherine Zuber's costumes, the muted colors of the main characters' outfits contrasting the more vibrant, elaborate frocks of Jo's overripe mock-Elizabethan melodramas.

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Virginia Theater; 1,275 seats; \$100 top

Production

A Randall L. Wreghitt, Dani Davis, Ken Gentry, Chase Mishkin, Worldwide Entertainment, Ruben Brache, Lisa Vioni, Jana Robbins, Aldiss Duke Associates presentation in association with John & Danita Thomas, Thomas Keegan, Scott Freiman and Theater Previews at Duke of a musical in two acts with music by Jason Howard, lyrics by Mindi Dickstein, book by Allan Knee, based on the novel by Louisa May Alcott. Directed by Susan H. Schulman.

Creative

Choreography, Michael Lichtefeld. Music director/conductor and additional arrangements, Andrew Wilder; orchestrations, Kim Schamberg; vocal arrangements, Lance Home; music coordinator, John Miller. Sets, Derek McLane; costumes, Catherine Zuber; lighting, Kenneth Posner; sound, Peter Hylenski; hair and wig design, Lazaro Arencibia; associate director, Darcy Evans; production stage manager, Scott Taylor Robinson. Opened Jan. 23, 2005. Reviewed Jan. 19. Running time: 2 HOURS, 35 MIN.

Cast

Professor Bhaer - John Hickok Jo - Sutton Foster Amy, The Troll - Amy McAlexander Meg, Clarissa - Jenny Powers Beth, Rodrigo Too - Megan McGinnis Marmee, The Hag - Maureen McGovern Mr. Laurence, The Knight - Robert Stattel Laurie, Rodrigo - Danny Gurwin Aunt March, Mrs. Kirke - Janet Carroll Mr. Brooke, Braxton - Jim Weitzer

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THEATER | THEATER REVIEW

A Tomboy With Gumption (and Her Sisters)

By BEN BRANTLEY JAN. 24, 2005

Sutton Foster never merely walks when she can scamper in the new musical "Little Women," which opened last night at the Virginia Theater. Playing Jo the tomboy in this perky, sketchy adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's classic novel of a New England girlhood, Ms. Foster creates a dizzyingly hyperkinetic creature who, were she living in the 21st century instead of the 19th, would probably be on heavy doses of Ritalin.

a theme touched on in many reviews.

Admirers of Ms. Foster's performance as an ingenuous flapper in "Thoroughly Modern Millie," for which she won a Tony Award, will be pleased to know that her level of pluckiness remains stratospherically high. "I've got a fire in me," announces Jo, an ambitious aspiring writer. Indeed, she glows with a fever that practically scorches. Though Ms. Foster shows winning flashes of a previously undetected gift for fresh comic line readings, theatergoers not enamored of unstinting eagerness may find her energy less infectious than exhausting.

One of the highlights for me with Jo. Could be with Foster's other performances too.

The same can be said of the overall experience of this "Little Women," directed by Susan H. Schulman and featuring a book by Allan Knee, with songs by Jason Howland and Mindi Dickstein. Watching this shorthand account of four sisters growing up poor but honest during the Civil War is like speed reading Alcott's evergreen novel of 1868. You glean the most salient traits of the principal characters, events and moral lessons, but without the shading and detail that made these elements feel true to life in the book. (A more grandiose musical version of another girl's-growing-pains classic, "Jane Eyre," suffered from similar shoe-horning.)

Aside from Ms. Foster and John Hickok, who gives the evening's most relaxed performance as Jo's avuncular suitor, the cast members most often bring to mind an 1860's-themed American Girl doll. Like the young owners of such dolls, theatergoers willing to use their imaginations may be able to project a transparency suggesting animated flesh onto these effigies in period costume. But that would mean the audience would have to work even harder than the performers.

As Mr. Knee has structured his adaptation, this "Little Women" is less a family album of the four March sisters and their stalwart mother, Marmee (the pop balladeer Maureen McGovern), than a portrait of the artist as a young hoyden. Though Jo has always been the main attraction in any of the film and stage versions of the novel (especially as Katharine Hepburn played her in George Cukor's enchanting 1933 movie), here her literary ambition eclipses the tale's homier aspects. *Isn't that the point in the 21st century?*

Both the acts begin with sustained musical vignettes in which Jo, having left her home in Concord, Mass., to seek her fortune in New York City, acts out Gothic adventure stories she has written. Other cast members materialize in swashbuckling attire (the reliable Catherine Zuber did the costumes) to portray the characters Jo summons into being. And Derek McLane's nifty multitiered, prop-strewn set evokes a sort of novelist's workshop of the mind. *I like this novel like set, perhaps incorporating storybook aspects into it.*

Presumably, this device is meant to reflect the fiction-teaching axiom that it is always best to write what you know. And it is in remembering her childhood in flashbacks that Jo discovers her true subject as an author and comes up with, well, "Little Women." But for better or worse, it's the over-the-top, introductory fantasy sequences -- performed by Ms. Foster in a cyclone of gestures and grimaces -- that are the most vivid scenes. You can understand why Jo first chose "blood and guts," as she puts it, over cardboard sentimentality.

The other March sisters seem to pass before your eyes like labeled luggage on a conveyor belt: Meg (Jenny Powers), the domestic one; Beth (Megan McGinnis), the quiet one; Amy (Amy McAlexander), the pretentious one. The same might be said of wise, dear Marmee; mean old Aunt March (Janet Carroll); crotchety old Mr.

Clearly a character development problem.

Laurence (Robert Stattel), the rich neighbor; his impish nephew, Laurie (Danny Gurwin); and Laurie's swoony tutor, Mr. Brooke (Jim Weitzer).

The novel's most fondly recalled set pieces are in place: Jo and Meg's first dance; Jo and Amy's falling out; the unfortunate conclusion of Jo and Laurie's one-sided romance. But they too seem to rush by in telegraphic haste, with a line tossed in here and there to let you know that the girls' father (whom we never meet) is a chaplain in the Union Army or that Beth and Jo are the closest of the sisters.

The effect is of calendar pages being torn off as they are in old movies to indicate the passage of time. (When Marmee asks, "How did you all grow up so fast?" you share her sense of wonder.) Since the characters do not acquire full personalities, you don't feel emotionally invested in them. Even when Beth dies -- conforming to the fate reserved for virtuous, quiet siblings in 19th-century fiction -- it's hard to muster a tear. (Beth, we hardly knew ye!)

Beth is memorialized in a power ballad sung in a strong, lovely alto by Ms. McGovern (best known for the Top-40 hit "The Morning After," from the 1972 movie "The Poseidon Adventure"). There are several such ballads, which are of the sub-Lloyd Webber variety. Otherwise, Mr. Howland's score is brisk, sprightly and forgettable, though appealingly performed by a synthesizer-free acoustic orchestra, a rarity on Broadway these days. Ms. Dickstein's lyrics are largely so generic they could slide right into a variety of different musicals. ("Take a chance on me." "I may be small, but I have giant plans.")

Interesting audience targeting. The slim and supple Ms. Foster has a lot to carry on those twitchy shoulders. If "Little Women" does develop the following of young girls and their mothers the producers have targeted, it will be largely Ms. Foster's doing. Her Jo brings to mind another brass-larynxed misfit, Elphaba, the green-skinned witch created by Idina Menzel in the reigning schoolgirl favorite of musicals, "Wicked." Jo even has an eardrum-quaking first-act curtain number like Elphaba's in "Wicked." It is called "Astonishing." But while Ms. Foster invests it with every ounce of her considerable skill and vigor, like so much of the show the song feels too ersatz to raise a single goosebump, much less astonish.

'Little Women: The Musical' Book by Allan Knee; music by Jason Howland; lyrics by Mindi Dickstein; directed by Susan H. Schulman; choreographed by Michael Lichtefeld; sets by Derek McLane; costumes by Catherine Zuber; lighting by Kenneth Posner; sound by Peter Hylenski; music director/conductor and additional arrangements, Andrew Wilder; orchestrations, Kim Scharnberg; vocal arrangements, Lance Horne; music coordinator, John Miller; technical supervisors, Larry Morley and William J. Craven; associate director, Darcy Evans; hair and wig design, Lazaro Arencibia; production supervisor, Beverley Randolph; marketing, the Marketing Group; general management, Richards/Climan Inc. Presented by Randall L. Wreghitt, Dani Davis, Ken Gentry, Chase Mishkin, Jack Utsick, Ruben Brache, Lisa Vioni, Jana Robbins, Addiss Duke Associates, in association with John and Danita Thomas, Thomas Keegan, Scott Freiman and Theater Previews at Duke. At the Virginia Theater, 245 West 52nd Street, Manhattan. Running time: 2 hours, 40 minutes.

WITH: Sutton Foster (Jo), Maureen McGovern (Marmee), John Hickok (Professor Bhaer), Amy McAlexander (Amy), Jenny Powers (Meg), Megan McGinnis (Beth), Robert Stattel (Mr. Laurence), Danny Gurwin (Laurie), Janet Carroll (Aunt March/Mrs. Kirk) and Jim Weitzer (Mr. Brooke).

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Were New York Drama Critics Astonished by Little Women?

By Broadway.com Staff January 24, 2005 - 10:27AM

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Morgan McGinnis, Sutton Foster, Jerry Powers & Amy McAlexander in Little Women

Audiences can't seem to get enough of the March sisters. Louisa May Alcott's novel about the four sisters has been on the big screen and in many theaters in straight play form. Now comes a new musical version of *Little Women*, headlined by Sutton Foster and Maureen McGovern, which officially opened at the Virginia Theatre on January 23 following a tryout at Duke University. Did critics find this *Little Women* astonishing? Here is a sample of what they had to say:

ABOUT THE SHOW

- Overview
- Photos



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Eric Grode in his Broadway.com

Review: "Little Women isn't the most sophisticated or rapturously melodic show you'll find on Broadway. But this chamber-size musical pulses with a generous affection for its source material and a refreshing realization that Broadway audiences don't always need to be wowed. Most audience members will arrive with a fair amount of foreknowledge: Louisa May Alcott's tale of four respectable sisters growing up in Civil War-era New England, notably the willful Alcott surrogate Jo, has been a perennial favorite among young women and men mostly women for almost 150 years. Theatergoers with no connection to the novel may have a tougher time at first, but the performances of Sutton Foster as Jo and especially Maureen McGovern as the matriarchal Marmee root the drama with a heart-felt confidence that overrides the show's shortcomings... A comfortable, honest, highly satisfying night at the theater."

Ben Brantley of *The New York Times*: "Watching this shorthand account of four sisters growing up poor but honest during the Civil War is like speed reading Alcott's evergreen novel of 1868. You glean the most salient traits of the principal characters, events and moral lessons, but without the shading and detail that made these elements feel true to life in the book... [Jason] Howland's score is brisk, sprightly and forgettable, though appealingly performed by a synthesizer-free acoustic orchestra, a rarity on Broadway these days. [Mindi] Dickstein's lyrics are largely so generic they could slide right into a variety of different musicals. The slim and supple [Sutton] Foster has a lot to carry on [her] twitchy shoulders. If *Little Women* develop the following of young girls and their mothers theaters have targeted, it will be largely Foster's doing. Her Jo is to mind another brass-larynxed misfit, Elphaba, the green-skinned witch created by Idina Menzel in the reigning schoolgirl

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favorite of musicals, *Wicked*. Jo even has an eardrum-quaking first-act curtain number like Elphaba's in *Wicked*. It is called *Astonishing*. But while Foster invests it with every ounce of her considerable skill and vigor, like so much of the show the song feels too ersatz to raise a single goosebump, much less astonish."

Clive Barnes of *The New York Post*: "The surprising thing is that Louisa May Alcott's sweet, adolescent tearjerker *Little Women* hasn't been made into a Broadway musical before: It had, after all, given rise to no fewer than four movie versions. Having finally arrived last night at the Virginia Theatre, the mystery remains. It really is a lovely story, full of simple, totally unsophisticated charm. Rodgers and Hammerstein could have crafted it into an endearing, enduring hit. The present production, skillfully staged by Susan H. Schulman, is full of delightfully calculated performances, including an entrancing turn by its giddily attractive star, Sutton Foster as Alcott's deliciously hoydenish, proto-feminist heroine, Jo. So much for the good news. For, just as you can't make a good beef stew without plenty of flavorful beef, you can't make a good Broadway musical, however appealing the seasoning of the story may be, without the right music. And the score to *Little Women*, with its Jason Howland music and Mindi Dickstein lyrics, is weak, generic and, when it's not unnoticeable, boring."

David Rooney of *Variety*: "It's hard not to love the March girls of Concord, Mass., so deeply etched are Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy on the cultural and emotional landscape that they resurface from generation to generation like cherished friends. That built-in affection is fortunate, then, for *Little Women*, a pleasant but staid revisit that's too leisurely in locating the heart of the material. But the producers of this unapologetically old-fashioned tuner have secured an appealing, capable cast whose conviction and energy help bolster the mostly unmemorable songs."

Michael Kuchwara of *The Associated Press*: "Jo March, the spirited center of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, is a perfect musical-theater heroine. She could be a distant cousin of such female independence icons as Nellie Forbush, Eliza Doolittle, Dolly Levi, Fanny Brice, Mame Dennis and more. And as played by Sutton Foster, Jo is a joy to watch in an otherwise lukewarm new musical... Foster works hard, very hard in fact, to lift the show, which is far too genteel for its own good. What entertainment it delivers is primarily in Foster's hands, and it is fortunate that this engaging, spunky performer is on stage for a good portion of the evening. *Little Women* has its heart in the right place and, for some, particularly those looking for family entertainment, its wholesome earnestness could be enough. Others will have to be content to savor the accomplishments of its star, who, indeed, does shine bright."

Gordon Cox of *Newsday*: "The show inflates the novel's minute goings-on to a scale better visible from the balcony, and you can sometimes feel the strain. What it has in its favor, though, is an ideally cast star at the head of an affectionate if oversized production, cleanly directed by Susan H. Schulman. Sutton Foster brings her endearingly gawky spunk to Jo, the de facto center of the novel and the obvious heroine onstage. On its own terms, this *Little Women* probably will satisfy, with a condensed take on a heartwarming story that hits the right broad emotional notes. When held next to the delicate novel, though, the pumped-up proceedings look somewhat diminished."

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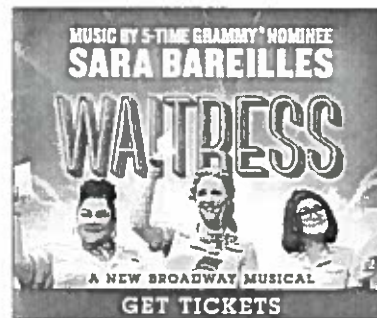


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THEATER REVIEW

Twisted Sisters

Sutton Foster is a delight, but everything else in *Little Women* goes horribly, horribly wrong.

By John Simon [Share This](#)

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(Photo: Amy Arbus)

When, after years of poverty, Louisa May Alcott had a best seller at 36 with *Little Women*, she exulted, "Paid up all the debts—thank the Lord—now I can die in peace." Had she seen the musical derived from it by Allan Knee (book), Jason Howland (music), and Mindi Dickstein (lyrics), she might instead have died of shame. True, it was originally commissioned by a children's theater, where, at the utmost, it belongs; yet would even a sophisticated teenager settle for this, to say nothing of his or her intelligent parent?

-certainly family friendly but emphasis on all the family

It's not the sentimentality: The 1933 movie version turned into a con dign classic, though, admittedly, a musical comedy is something else again.

Jason Howland hasn't come up with much that resembles a tune, which made me almost sorrier for him than for my shortchanged self. A conscious or unconscious disciple of Frank Wildhorn, he is to music what a kazoo is to a symphony orchestra. As for the Dickstein lyrics, they may give mediocrity a bad name, trudging at best to "We could live a million dreams, / But only if we dare. / We could go to such extremes. / There's so much we could share. / We'll circle the world / Doing all we ever dreamed of," and so sweetly on. With all those dreams kicking around, someone must have dreamed this could make a valid Broadway musical. Dream again, pal.

-rude comments

Alan Knee's book is not so much the novel boiled down as the CliffsNotes stretched thin; a skeleton may be here, but where is the flesh? Dutifully but routinely directed by Susan H. Shulman, it may be the first clunky set by the gifted designer Derek McLane. The show doesn't lend itself to much dance, but Michael Lichtfeld has choreographed it like a borrower whose credit has run out. Of the four March girls, one—Sutton Foster as Jo—does indeed march; the others merely drag their feet. Jenny Powers's Meg verges on bearable; Megan McGinnis, a goofy Beth, and Amy McAlexander, who must have been cast as Amy merely on her name, are hopeless. Sisterhood has never been as unbeautiful. Foster, a talented singing actress, aware of the surrounding vacuum, overcompensates at times. As Marmee, Maureen McGovern sings beautifully, but is histrionically challenged. The others are either miscast or feeble, some even managing both. Catherine Zuber and Kenneth Posner do dependably, but no one ever emerged from a musical humming the costumes and lighting. *Little Women* takes place in the 1860s, yet the show doesn't even succeed in setting back the musical 140 years; a hundred is the best it can do.

-smoother transitions needed.

Little Women

Directed by Susan H. Shulman.
Virginia Theatre.

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Theater

'Little Women': Girls Gone Mild

By Peter Marks

Washington Post Staff Writer
Friday, June 30, 2006

Somewhere up there, perched in her celestial rocking chair, Louisa May Alcott is gazing down on the touring musical adaptation of her beloved "Little Women" -- and wondering when the darn thing is going to get her in the gut.

Eventually, though, she'll weary of waiting, sort through her DVDs and switch to "Terms of Endearment."

Patrons in the Kennedy Center Opera House have no such option. We maintain a vigil for nearly three hours, in the vain expectation that this innocuous version will find its emotional footing in the almost reflexively heart-melting story of Beth's death, Marmee's warmth, Jo's pluck and Meg's joy.

Nothing close to tears is ever summoned. And what in tarnation is the point of musicalizing "Little Women" if it is unable to raise in the throat a single measly lump?

Stocked with antiseptic songs -- Jason Howland's music and Mindi Dickstein's lyrics are so predictably by-the-numbers they could have been leased from Rent-a-Score -- this "Little Women" is tailored for those whose wish for the theater is that it settle their nerves. Which does give the production medicinal value. Doctors could instruct patients to take two seats and call them in the morning.

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The plot mechanics in the saga of the struggling March family, eking out life in rural Massachusetts while the father is off in the Civil War, are handled fairly efficiently in Allan Knee's libretto and Susan H. Schulman's staging. The focus is, of course, on the outsize ambition of gutsy Jo (Kate Fisher), a young woman with a burning desire to be a writer and an impetuous nature that is both a blessing and a burden.

In straightforward fashion, the familiar tumult in the sisters' lives is revealed:

Amy (Gwen Hollander) develops airs; Meg (Renee Brna), a romance; Beth (Autumn Hurlbert), scarlet fever. The boy next door (Stephen Patterson) and a German professor from the big city (Andrew Varela) both fall for Jo, while salt of the New England earth Marmee (Maureen McGovern) keeps herself occupied with the casting of assorted glances: worried, disapproving, nurturing.

Each episode is marked off with a number adhering to the general formula. The March sisters sing their four-musketeers anthem ("Our Finest Dreams") and Jo hits high notes about fame ("Astonishing") and Marmee gets an inspirational, you'll-never-walk-alone-type ballad ("Days of Plenty").

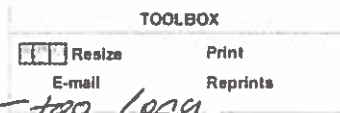
McGovern, better known as a pop recording artist from the '60s and '70s, is in particularly luscious voice here. The shame of it is that she's allowed to let loose only a couple of times all evening. The vocals all around are strong. Varela is even better than strong in "How I Am" and "Small Umbrella in the Rain." Refreshingly, he also manages to create a bona fide character out of the romantically challenged academic who finally musters the courage to profess his love. (The confession, late in the proceedings, is the evening's only stirring outburst.)

Some of the ancillary characters, such as snooty Aunt March (Neva Rae Powers) and cranky Mr. Laurence (Robert Stattel) are irritatingly drawn as shallow narrative devices.

More disastrously, however, this "Little Women" -- which ran for a scant 137 performances on Broadway last year -- uses dramatizations of one of the amateurish "blood and guts"



The touring "Little Women" musical, now at the Kennedy Center, has an abundance of voice but a shortage of heart. (By Joan Marcus -- The Kennedy Center)



Important moments to stage

Important to develop.

The opposite to what most reviews say.

stories Jo writes to kick off both acts of the musical. The intention may be a comic explication of an author struggling to find her voice, but the scenes don't register as especially witty or satirical.

If anything, these interludes serve only to foreshadow events of stolid effect yet to unfold. What this "Little Women" reminds us of most pointedly is that the war that keeps the March girls' father away is a mighty long one, indeed.

Little Women, music by Jason Howland, lyrics by Mindi Dickstein, book by Allan Knee. Directed by Susan H. Schulman. Choreography, Michael Lichtefeld; sets, Derek McLane; costumes, Catherine Zuber; lighting, Kenneth Posner; sound, Peter Hylenski; orchestrations, Kim Scharnberg; musical director, Douglas Coates. With Kevin Duda. Approximately 2 hours 45 minutes. Through July 23 at the Kennedy Center. Call 202-467-4600 or visit <http://www.kennedy-center.org/>.

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SMT Presents "Little Women" July 6-7 and 12-14

July 2, 2007

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MACOMB, IL -- "A Broadway musical designed for the whole family" (The New York Sun), "Little Women" will be performed by Western Illinois University's Summer Music Theatre (SMT) at 7:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, July 6-7, and Thursday-Saturday, July 12-14 in the Browne Hall Hainline Theatre.

Louisa May Alcott's popular novel based on her own family experiences is "finely structured storytelling" which "fills the heart and eye," according to a Chicago Sun-Times review. A new musical, "Little Women" opened on Broadway in January 2005, starring Maureen McGovern.

The SMT production follows the adventures of Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy March – who are all played by students in Western's Bachelor of Fine Arts in musical theatre program – as they grow up in Civil War America. They include sophomore Colleen Johnson (Effingham, IL) as Jo; senior Cari Downing (Coal Valley, IL) as Meg; senior Tori Ekstrom (Frankfort, IL) as Beth; and junior Kristen Arntzen (River Grove, IL) as Amy. Senior musical theatre major Julia Thurlow (Aurora, IL) portrays the family matriarch, Marmee; and alumnus Adam Lewis (Rock Island), who played Harold Hill in the SMT's opening production, "The Music Man," returns to the stage as Professor Bhaer, Jo's shy suitor.

Western Illinois sophomore musical theatre major Sara King (Lebanon, IL) is the cantankerous Aunt March; Drew Hampton (Arlington, TX), a WIU Master of Fine Arts student, plays Meg's love interest John Brooke; and junior musical theatre majors Micah Spayer (Peoria, IL) is Laurie, the March sisters' close friend and neighbor; while Kyle Cassady (Ancona, IL) plays Rodrigo, a swashbuckling hero in one of Jo's operatic tragedies.

Guest director is Karen Lamb, an instructor of on-camera acting and improvisation for the Libby Stone Talent Agency, Charlotte, NC. Lamb is a professional colleague of Jeannie Woods, Western's



In rehearsal for "Little Women" are (l-r) Kristin Arntzen as Amy, Tori Ekstrom as Beth, Cari Downing as Meg and Colleen Johnson as Jo. Photo by Jeannie Woods, theatre chair.

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(http://www.wiu.edu/images/news/5510/5510_880_1.JPG)

theatre and dance department chair, having worked together at Actors Theater in Charlotte and teaching together at Winthrop University (SC).

Lamb has worked at theaters across the U.S. as a director, actor, teacher, dramaturge and producer. These theatres include the Dallas/Fort Worth Theaters of Undermain; The Dallas Theatre Center; The National Playwrights Conference in Waterford, CT; and New York's Manhattan Theatre Club, Lincoln Center and Fishbowl. She has also worked at La Mama Umbria in Italy and Toi Whakarri in New Zealand. Lamb is also a commercial and voice-over talent for companies such as Exxon, Radio Shack and Kroger.

Kitty Karn, a Summer Music Theatre actor and Western Illinois assistant professor of voice and musical theatre, is the musical director. Designers include professors David Patrick for set, Ray Gabica for costumes and Tim Kupka for lighting. Fight choreography is by Cassidy, who plays Rodrigo, and junior theatre major Zach Meyer (Aurora, IL).

"Little Women" is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI).

Individual show tickets are \$20 for adults, \$15 for seniors age 62 and above and \$10 for children age 12 and under. A reduced rate for groups of 12 or more can be arranged. To order tickets contact the box office at 309/298-2900 from noon-5 p.m. weekdays. Tickets can also be purchased online at www.wiu.com/theatre (<http://www.wiu.com/theatre>).

Western's final Summer Music Theatre production will be "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change," July 20-21 and 26-28.

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Review: Little Women the Musical (Oct. 20)

By ABQJournal News Staff

Saturday, October 20th, 2007 at 11:40am

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — It took a long time for a musical version of Louisa May Alcott's beloved American classic "Little Women" (1868) to reach the stage. "Little Women the Musical," presented by The Growing Stage at the South Broadway Cultural Center, opened on Broadway in 2005 with book by Allan Knee, lyrics by Mindi Dickstein, and music by Jason Howland.

The songs are sprightly, if not particularly memorable, and quickly move the story forward. "Little Women the Musical" includes the highlights of Alcott's book. While their father is away in the Civil War, the four March sisters—domestic Meg, independent Jo, angelic Beth, and artistic Amy—experience joys and sorrows as they grow up together in New England. They have two very different role models, Aunt March, a wealthy social snob, and their mother Marmee, strong, wise, humble, and resilient. The play focuses on Jo who wants desperately to be a professional writer, opening with a dramatization of one of her "blood and guts" gothic stories. Only when she writes about her own family and experience does she find success.

Director Matthew Naegeli has assembled a talented, attractive, and committed cast.

Accompanied by an onstage orchestra of twelve, the voices are uniformly strong and assured. The sisters especially shine. Zoe Reese is charming as Beth, and "Off to

Massachusetts," her duet with Paul Barlow as Mr. Laurence (featuring the rhyme "Massachusetts / until the glue sets") is good fun. Meg (Leah Tuttle) and her suitor John Brooke (James Gonzales) make a comfortable couple, while Caitlin Wees captures Amy's transitions nicely. Erin Warden brings plenty of energy to Jo. She belts out her first act curtain song "Astonishing" in true Broadway fashion.

Good praise but for a unimportant song.

The supporting cast is also entertaining. Erin Moody is a comic Aunt March bustling about trying to civilize Jo. Lorri Oliver is ideal as the maternal Marmee who sings a plaintive ballad of loss and acceptance, "Days of Plenty." As Laurie, Jo's first suitor, Bryan Gilliland seems overmatched, but his character is comfortable with Amy as explained in "The Most Amazing Thing." Michael Finnegan is a welcome addition as Professor Bhaer, the man who wins Jo's heart.

Costumes are sumptuous, but too much time is spent bringing Director Naegeli's sets on and off stage. The production moved the family audience to shrieks of joy and a standing ovation.

once again this will slow the production down.

If You Go

WHAT: Little Women

WHEN: Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. through October 28

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BY

JOHN BURNET

OF LINCOLN

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'Little Women' energizes the stage at Marriott Theatre

By Deborah Donovan | Daily Herald Staff



(L-R) Morgan Weed (Amy), Abby Mueller (Meg) and Heidi Kettenring (Jo) star in "Little Women."

1 of 1

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Published: 12/13/2007 12:32 PM | Updated: 12/13/2007 3:01 PM

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The spirit and energy of the great American classic, "Little Women" thrives in the musical at The Marriott Theatre in Lincolnshire.

While most of the songs advance the story pleasantly if without magic, "Astonishing," is the showpiece for star Heidi Kettenring.

Known for her role as Nessarose in the Chicago production of "Wicked," Kettenring closes the first act with "I will blaze until I find my time and place ... I'll be Astonishing. Astonishing. Astonishing. At Last."

Another high point is her duet with Dara Cameron's Beth on "Some Things Are Meant To Be," which turns out to be a very sensitive farewell to the dying sister.

Like everyone in the cast, Paula Scrofano sings beautifully, but her Marmee also gently commands the stage.

While the play based on Louisa May Alcott's semi-autobiographical novel obviously offers great roles for female actresses, the men have their moments.

John Reeger's Mr. Laurence gets to show off his voice along with Cameron in their duet with the ditty "Off to Massachusetts."

"Our Finest Dreams" - the March sisters' celebration of their togetherness as well as Jo's cleverness, inspires thoughts that the play could use more duets or group numbers.

Nancy Missimi's costumes are lush, and Thomas M. Ryan's set - necessarily sparse because the stage is in the round - evocative.

"Little Women" has been popular since its publication in 1868, giving fans books, plays and movies to compare with this version, which shouldn't disappoint.

Much of the dialogue and feminist sentiment seems very up-to-date. And it's still full of lessons for young women.



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I enjoy all the group numbers, high light of play but don't always help the story along.

One ironic note: Despite the theme of the determined tomboy, Alcott takes the more traditional route of sending the family's father off to serve in the Civil War. In reality, Louisa May herself was an Army nurse for a short stint during the conflict.

- interesting historical notes on Alcott

And while her alter ego Jo finds romance and seems to "have it all" - the goal of many career women today - the author in fact never married.

"Little Women"

3 1/2 stars out of four

Location: The Marriott Theatre, Milwaukee Avenue (Route 21/U.S. 45) just south of Half Day Road (Route 22), Lincolnshire.

Times: 1 and 8 p.m. Wednesday, 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 5 and 8:30 p.m. Saturday and 1 and 5 p.m. Sunday through Feb. 3.

Running time: About 2½ hours, including intermission

Tickets: \$45 plus tax and handling fees.

Box office: (847) 634-0200 or www.marriotttheatre.com

Rating: All ages

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Entertainment

REVIEW

Little Women at Acacia Theatre

By Russ Bickerstaff - Jul 15th, 2009 09:49 am

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Acacia Theatre Company opened *Little Women: the Broadway Musical* this past weekend at Concordia University's Todd Wehr Auditorium. Based on the beloved tale by Louisa May Alcott, the musical version follows most of the main events of the novel with few omissions. Even though the merging of an American classic with songs may seem idyllic, it instead turns the charming story of four sisters during the American Civil War into caricature. The charm of Alcott's story is lost despite the adequate and sometimes even endearing performances.

Based on Alcott's own childhood and young adult years in Massachusetts, *Little Women* chronicles the life of Alcott's transcendentalist family. During her far-from-typical youth, Alcott's parents were friends with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Alcott's liberal home life encouraged her not only to pursue writing but also to do so in the genuine tone that makes *Little Women* endure. A musical version of Alcott's fictionalized life feels disingenuous, even if it was perfectly pitched and played out.

Jo March has always been the sister that reflects Alcott herself. Stacy Becker is slightly careless and petulant in her portrayal of Jo. However, her joy and spontaneity is right on the mark. Becker is also

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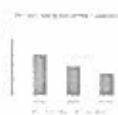
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able to move the show forward with ideal pacing. Several others in the cast could not keep up.

Potential doubling

Elaine Rewolinski as Aunt March and Mrs. Kirk and Mike D. DeLong as Mr. Laurence (and the Knight) do not miss a single beat in their performances, and provide much needed humor throughout the 180-minute show. Cherisse Duncan is lovely as the shyest March sister, Beth. She is especially sweet in a final scene with Becker and in her duet of 'Off to Massachusetts' with DeLong. Anna Bauer as Meg March and Magdelyn Monahan as Amy March are both competent, if slightly two-dimensional. David Mews is miscast as Laurie, the neighbor fascinated by the four March sisters.

, certainly "Asterisking" will be a challenge.

Much of the singing was strained and most of the actors seemed not quite able to hit the range required by each song. A few actors even had enormous trouble 'selling the song' when vocals were not up to task. The two and a half hour show may be too long for many children, and those familiar with the book will miss little details like Amy's last will and testament, Meg's make-over and the hedge post

↳ this would make it even longer



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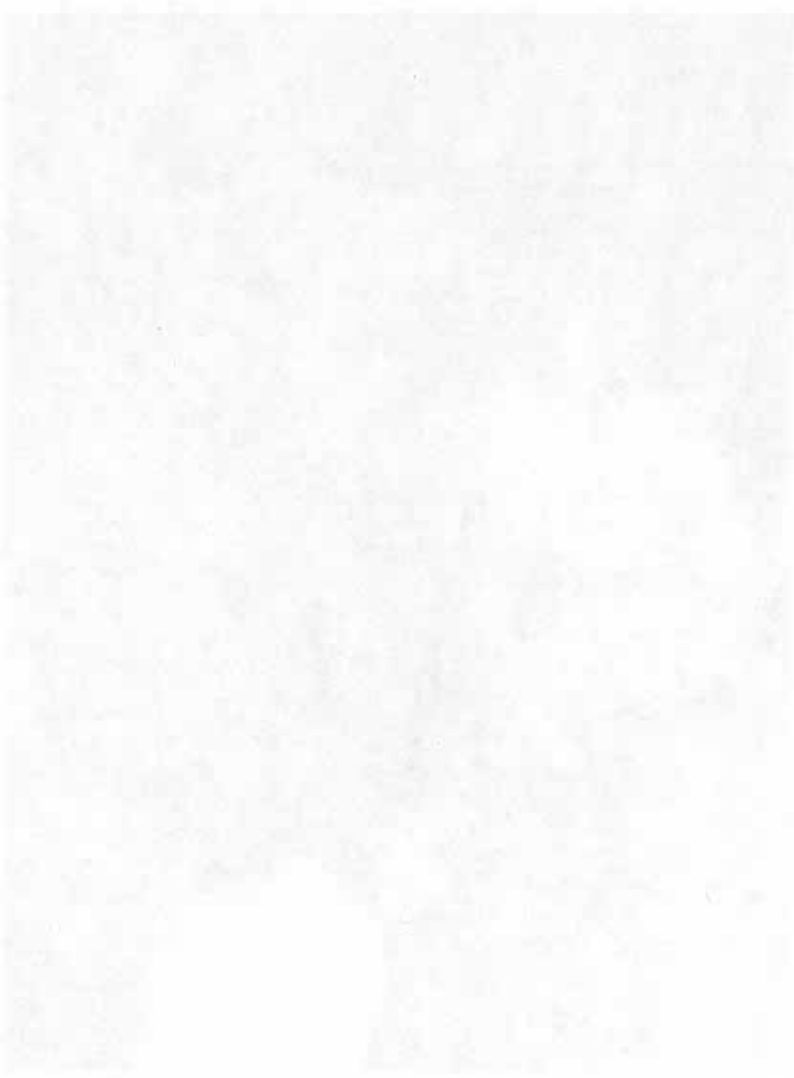
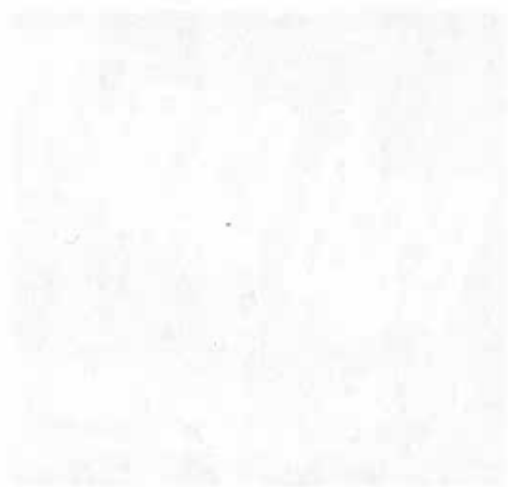
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office. Acacia's production proves to be a half-hearted interpretation of Alcott's classic.

Little Women: the Musical completes its short run now through July 19. Call 414.744.5995 or visit the website at

www.acacia theatre.com for ticketing information and more.



Theater

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LA Theater Review

Little Women: The Broadway Musical

By Melinda Schupmann | Posted Nov. 25, 2009, 2:34 p.m.

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During the holiday season, theater companies generally mete out their most treacly offerings, and Louisa May Alcott's beloved story of four sisters during the Civil War certainly qualifies. This production's saving grace, however, is in the enthusiasm of its cast and its smart pacing.

The March sisters—Jo (Erika C. Miller), Beth (Melissa Dunham), Meg (Stephanie Philo), and Amy (young Sarah Pierce and older Ali Axelrad)—live quietly with their mother (Eloise Coopersmith) in Massachusetts while their father is away serving as an army chaplain. At a time when a woman's greatest desire is to marry well, Jo is rebelliously passionate about eschewing that and becoming a famous writer. Her wildly romantic tales of villains and victims figure largely in the household and as a comic contrivance for the production.

The cast is rounded out by Meg's handsome suitor (Andrew Eddins); Jo's love interest, Professor Bhaer (Jason James); the crusty duo of Aunt March (Sherry Domerego) and Mr. Lawrence (Glenn Koppel); and Lawrence's grandson, Laurie (Brandon Sanchez).

Allan Knee's book, Jason Howland's music, and Mindi Dickstein's lyrics point sweetly toward the values of love and family. The story often seems interrupted by the music rather than enhanced by it; this tends to slow down the production. Some exceptions are "More Than I Am," a lovely duet by Eddins and Philo as he leaves for war; James' poignant "How I Am" by the shy professor; and Miller's wisely revelatory "Sometimes When You Dream."

Director Casey Long uses a minimalist set for the production, and it is arguable whether actors moving furniture as needed breaks the mood. His frequent tableau-style positioning of characters often serves as an artistic snapshot. This is an ensemble show; its actors are well-matched vocally and temperamentally. Notable are James and Domerego for thoughtful characterizations.

It would be Scrooge-like to find fault with the show, as it is a crowd pleaser and a perfectly sentimental tale. There are times, though, when one wishes that the authors made the characters less noble and a lot spicier.

Presented by and at the Chance Theater, 5552 E. La Palma Ave., Anaheim. Nov. 20–Dec. 27. Thu.–Fri. 8 p.m.; Sat., 3 and 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 and 7 p.m. (Dark Nov. 26, Dec. 24 and 25.) (714) 777-3033. www.chancetheater.com.

Interesting, this could be why this production was less notable.
Too away from the flow of the actors

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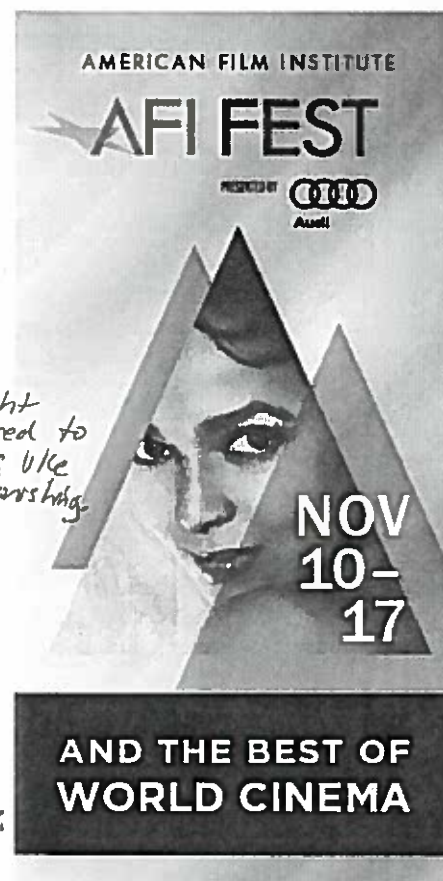
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