

## Little Women Blog

Dramaturg: Sean Connolly

Dramaturging *Little Women: The Musical* has been a fascinating challenge. Having been constricted to straight plays since childhood delving into a musical has not only opened my eyes to music, but helped me find those nuggets of drama magic and nuance in dialogue that only musicals can provide. For me, it has been a truly exciting production to be apart of. Firstly, *Little Women* is such a rich time period to research, it has honestly been a dramaturg's dream, especially since it is a part of history not often discussed. When we talk about the Civil War, we often think of great battles, or burning Southern towns. If we are especially attuned we might even consider the dramatizations presented in *Gangs of New York* or *Gone With The Wind*. But real in depth exploration of the home front, particularly the Northern Home Front has been left to a few aging historians. That is for the exception of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. What's really exciting about *Little Women: The Musical*, and particularly working with Valerie as director of the musical, is that we are really trying to bring this classic story into the 21st Century. The roots of this modern interpretation is actually already explored by Alcott herself, but has often been lost in the nostalgia of the piece. At the time her tale was radical and revolutionary. This was partially because she was a Transcendentalist, a passionate Abolitionist, feminist and reformer. Which brings up one of the most contentiously talked about moments in *Little Women*. Thousands of readers of the novel have asked the question: Why doesn't Jo marry Laurie? This resulted in some very forceful conversations with publishers and fans of the novel in 1868. However, the answer is actually quite simple. Alcott didn't want Jo to marry at all. Alcott wanted to create a character, Jo, who didn't need a man. This was very radical back then. Hundreds wrote to Alcott to complain when Jo refused Laurie's proposal. Eventually publishers

got involved and threatened to not publisher *Little Women Part 2* if Jo remained unmarried. Clearly they were hoping to force Alcott into marrying Jo to Laurie. However, Alcott was so furious she developed a new plan. She would marry Jo but not to the man everyone wanted, Professor Bhaer. All of this had an unintended consequence. A completely a-sexual story. The challenge for a 21st century audience is that we are interested in sex and that makes this a challenge for any production of *Little Women*. These moments of possible passion are there in the music and on the page, but they have been hidden beneath a Victorian view of Alcott's world and a holy reverence of the novel. On the surface all the characters are in their head, they all have an intellectual affection for one another but not a physical one. All this comes back to that original question that thousands of readers have been asking since 1868, why doesn't Jo marry Laurie? For our production we needed to find the drive in Laurie, we had to make him a little boastful, he can't just be the kids next door. Instead he has to be a complex character driven not only by an intellectual admiration of Jo but also a sexual drive. Jo is the same. She is driven intellectually but also we need to know the sexual desires that she has. That is the impetus for Jo not marrying Laurie. Instead she finds an equal partner in both intellect and sex when he falls for Professor Bhaer. These explorations of character have what made working on this production so much more than just a time period. For me, it proves that these characters are just as real and exciting now as they were in 1868.