

EastLine Theatre's 'Little Women' Receives a Well-deserved Standing Ovation

By Cindi Sansone-Braff

EastLine Theatre ends its successful 2024 season at the BACCA Arts Center with Kate Hamill's 2018 radical stage adaptation of the classic coming-of-age novel by Louisa May Alcott, "Little Women." Published in 1868, Alcott's "Little Women," set during and after the American Civil War, tells the story of the March sisters. Featuring traditionalist Meg, rebellious Jo, timid Beth, and spoiled Amy, the plot revolves around the inner and outer struggles these four spirited sisters experience while growing up in a harshly judgmental world filled with gender stereotypes.

"This is a timeless story, and it is one that has found its way into the hearts and lives of many people since its release," says director Anjor Khadilkar. "Our production aims to engage with and expand on themes relevant to today's audiences – ones always present in the original text. This is a play about family and the love that can bind a group of girls – ordinary people with an extraordinary love and care for each other, the sort that people everywhere see

themselves in and feel comforted and inspired by."

Under Khadilkar's astute direction, the cast members' electrifying chemistry kept the audience riveted throughout. The director's artful staging, especially the scene transitions that flowed smoothly from one to the next, made this a visually captivating production. Speaking with Khadilkar after the show, she pointed out how important it was for the actors to articulate their words to ensure the audience experienced the beauty of Hamill's well-crafted dialogue.

The lead character in the show is Jo, the second eldest of the March sisters. Jo is a strong-willed, imaginative, and independent thinker—traits frowned upon in a woman during the 19th Century. Jo loves putting on plays with her sisters and always casts herself in male leads. She dreams of being a successful writer, traveling the world, and living an unconventional life. Victoria Gentle, perfectly cast in this role, commanded the stage, often donning trousers, much to the dismay of others, since this was not the acceptable fashion for women to wear.

Meg, the oldest sister, is more



traditional in her approach to life. Although severely myopic, in one amusing scene, she forgoes wearing glasses in a vain attempt to look more glamorous. Kendra Perry gave a nuanced performance as Meg, a well-meaning young woman who longs for marriage and children but struggles with the formidable responsibility of being a wife and mother.

Victoria Kay was riveting as Beth, a timid, withdrawn, and frail young woman. Unlike her other sisters, Beth has no big dreams, aspirations, or plans for the future and seems content to spend her life in the confines of her family home. Beth serves as the conscience of her family, and as shy and fearful as she is, she manages to muster up the courage necessary to help and assist those she loves.

Amanda Luong believably portrayed the immature, spoiled drama queen, Amy, the youngest of the March sisters. Trying to impress everyone with her extensive vocabulary, Amy mispronounces one word after another, saying things like aggregating when she means to say aggravating. Jo loves to tease her and document Amy's malapropisms in a notebook.

Paul DeFilippo brought charm and warmth to his depiction of Theodore Laurence, a young man of wealth who lives with his grandfather in a neighboring estate. He is a kindred spirit to all the March sisters and delights in partaking in all the frantic activities happening in the bustling March household.

This show calls for a large

cast, and the multi-talented ensemble did an extraordinary job of doubling up on their roles. Julianna Viviani gave an outstanding performance as Marmee, the girl's loving mother who encourages her daughters to think for themselves and to be accountable for their actions. Viviani showcased her strong comedic skills in the role of Mrs. Mingott, a woman determined to find appropriate suitors for Jo and Meg. John Brautigam delivered a stellar performance as John Brooks, Theodore's tutor, a stuffy man who finally lightens up after falling in love with Meg. Brooks garnered some of the biggest laughs of the evening with his hilarious depiction of the Doctor and the ill-tempered parrot, Polly. Debbie Starker, a charismatic and polished actor, brought much-needed comedic relief to the play with her spot-on portrayal of Hannah, the March's feisty housekeeper. Starker was equally hilarious as Aunt March, a mean-spirited, wealthy spinster. Van Whitaker, a brilliant character actor, gave memorable performances as Theodore's grandfather, the girl's abolitionist father, Robert March, and Mr. Dashwood, a misogynistic editor who mistreats Jo.

EastLine Theatre presents this must-see, family-friendly show in partnership with the Babylon Citizens Council on the Arts. Wendy Grimm and Lynn Adler designed the fabulous Civil War-era costumes, Nicole Savin designed the lighting, and John Brautigam composed the original music.

"Little Women" is performed at the BACCA Arts Center in Lindenhurst and runs through December 22, 2024. Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased at eastline.ludus.com. More information is available at eastlinetheatre.org or by calling 516-749-5047.

Cindi Sansone-Braff is an award-winning playwright. She has a BFA in Theatre from UCONN and is a member of the Dramatists Guild. She is the author of "Grant Me a Higher Love," "Why Good People Can't Leave Bad Relationships," and "Confessions of a Reluctant Long Island Psychic." Her full-length Music Drama, "Beethoven, The Man, The Myth, The Music," is published by Next Stage Press. www.Grantmeahigherlove.com.

