**Little Women**

**Programme notes for Act 1 (AD Gwen Furniss 17th to 21st June 2025)**

Welcome to Theatre Royal Plymouth for this performance of Little Women, based on the book by Louisa May Alcott, and adapted for stage by Anne-Marie Casey. Produced by Lee Dean and Daniel Schumann, in association with Pitlochry Festival Theatre, The Belgrade Coventry and Blackpool Grand Theatre. My name is Gwen and I will be audio describing Act 1. Act 2 will be described by Pauline.

The story is set during the American civil war, and starts in 1862. The setting is the house of the March family in Concord, Massachusetts. The house is comfortable, though sparsely furnished and faded.

The set, which remains the same throughout, is designed to encompass both indoor and outdoor scenes. The backdrop is dark, and clusters of tall, spindly silver birches are to either side, portraying the woodland area around the house and also, at times, suggesting the walls and windows of the house itself. To the left, almost hidden in a clump of trees, is a piano, made of a lightish maple wood with turned legs. A shawl hangs over the piano and there is a piano stool beside it. Further toward the front of the stage from left to right, there is a four legged wooden stool, then a chaise longue, on which is a folded quilted blanket. In the centre of the stage is a lighted Christmas tree, to denote the time of year. The tree is moved off stage at other times of year. At the rear is a hat stand, on which are hung bonnets and coats and umbrellas. These are used by the cast for outdoor scenes. A table with four chairs is positioned in front of the Christmas tree, and a white cloth is laid over the table. To the right is Jo’s writing desk and chair. Beside it is a wicker chest, which contains Jo’s writings and dressing up clothes. There is an inkwell on the desk.

As seen at the start, before the play begins, mist rises among the trees and dappled light shines from above. Entrances to the stage are to either side, near the front, and also to the rear, between the trees, to portray entrance into the house from outdoors. At times, a red curtain is partly drawn across the front of the stage, for example, when Meg and Jo arrive at the Gardiners’ house they are in front of the curtain, with the suggestion that the ballroom lies behind it. Although the scenery doesn’t change in act 1, there are pauses between the scenes to denote the passing of time, and changing of the seasons. During these pauses, the March family can be seen in half light, doing household chores and sometimes singing.

Abigail March, called “Marmee” by her daughters, is head of the household, in the absence of her husband who is away at the war, as an army chaplain. Marmee is a small woman, much loved by her daughters, always busy and caring for her family as well as helping out neighbours who are suffering hardship. Her dark hair is parted in the centre and pinned back into a bun, and we first see her in her outdoor clothes, a poke bonnet and green checked coat with cape collar. Her dress has a fitted bodice, long sleeves and a very full skirt.

The four March sisters are all in their teens at the start of the play, though the story covers a period of about 4 years. The oldest, Meg, is 19, dark hair pulled back into a bun, like her mother’s, but with ringletted strands framing her face. She wears a pale green dress. All the girls’ dresses are of similar style: a fitted bodice with long sleeves and very full skirts and petticoats. They all wear short leather boots, though for the ballroom scene, Meg wears off-white high heeled shoes which she has difficulty walking in. Toward the end of act 1, she wears a dark orange silk dress. Meg is feminine, sensible and caring, a younger version of Marmee.

Next we have Jo. She is 17 at the start of the story, not at all ladylike, resenting the fact that she is becoming a woman, and spending her time writing stories and encouraging her sisters to dress up and act out the stories. Her pale blue dress has a scorch mark on the back of the skirt, where she stood too close to the hearth. As the girls act out a play that Jo has written, Jo wears a tricorne hat and a dark green velvet coat with gold braid, to depict a swashbuckling character. Jo’s reddish brown hair is loose and straggling, a stranger to the hairbrush! When she sits at her desk to write, she puts on her “scribbling suit” which consists of a black shawl and a floppy black hat. Apart from the times when she is writing, Jo is constantly on the move, rushing around, making expansive gestures.

At age 16, Beth March is pale faced, with reddish hair worn loose. She wears a pale blue print dress, and she loves to play the piano.

The youngest, Amy, is 14 at the start. She has a round face, framed with dark shoulder-length hair. Her dress is a pinky brown colour and the skirt is slightly shorter than that of her sisters.

The girls’ aunt, who they call Aunt March, is a tall, prim and proper spinster, with a strident voice and slightly nasal New England accent. Her grey-blond hair is pinned up severely, framing her sharply-featured face. She is always impeccably dressed. We first see her in a teal blue ball gown, with a flounced hem to the overskirt, a black lace insert at the neckline, black lace gloves and glittering earrings. In a later scene, she wears a white blouse with high neck and a full black skirt with teal blue trim at the hem.

The March family have a new neighbour, a tall and slim young man, Theodore Laurence, who is known as “Laurie”. He is recently orphaned, but lives with his tutor and household staff. He is 18 years old, and at the start of the play he is happy to join in with Jo’s childish tomboy games. Though as time goes by he becomes more melancholic and addicted to alcohol and cigarettes. Laurie, when we first see him, wears a black suit with tail coat, a white shirt with wing collar and white waistcoat, and shiny black shoes. He has straight dark brown hair cut at an angle around his ears, and is clean-shaven. In the snow scene, he wears a long grey overcoat and red scarf. In a later indoor scene, he wears a white shirt with rolled up sleeves, , a red cravat and waistcoat, and beige trousers with brown shoes.

Laurie’s tutor, John Brooke, is similarly dressed. He is a man in his 30s, shorter stature than Laurie, with short black hair and a moustache.

The play makes use of sound effects, such as gunfire to depict the fighting in the civil war, the sound of bird song and the cracking of ice in the lake. In the winter outdoor scenes, snow falls from above.

The cast is as follows:

Honeysuckle Weeks as Marmee March

Jade Kennedy as Meg

Grace Molony as Jo

Catherine Chalk as Beth

Imogen Elliott as Amy

Belinda Lang as Aunt March

Cillian Lenaghan as Laurie

Jack Ashton as John Brooke.

There will be an interval of 20 minutes and Pauline will give a brief introduction to Act 2 before it starts.

Theatre Royal Plymouth

Little Women  Act 2

Audio described performance

 Saturday June   21st 2025 @ 2.30p.m.

Touch Tour 1.30pm.

Describer Pauline Raw

Good Afternoon and welcome back  to this  lively production of Little Women directed  by  Loveday Ingram.

The play will transfer to  Salisbury  then on to Poole, Darlington,Chelmsford,Guildford and  Bath  before finishing their tour in November in   Liverpool.

As my colleague Gwen has stated , the play is set in  Massachusetts during the American Civil War 1861-9  and the family are fatherless due to  his  being conscripted  into the  Union Army as a Chaplain.

My name is Pauline and I will be describing Act 2 as the action takes place  but I  will  also deliver my programme notes 6 minutes  before the Curtain goes up.

**There will be  mild violence, shouting, death and bereavement.**

This will be the final 5 scenes lasting  approximately 40 minutes and the Act   will commence after the dramatic departure of Laurie when  his proposal of marriage was  rejected by Jo.

The scenery  remains the same, tall spindly silver birch  tree trunks frame the few pieces of furniture in the March House which also becomes Mrs Kirke’s Boarding House and  A  Ballroom in Paris with the addition of a full height rich red curtain.

 The scenes change, not always  with a movement of scenery or props,  but with  the characters themselves  moving to different locations and positions with overlying music  within the set  to depict a new scene.

 A year or so later and Jo and Marmee arrive in New York,  dressed in long waisted  dresses, under short caped  coats and poke bonnets and are looking for  Mrs Kirke’s  Boarding House.  They literally bump into   Professor Bhaer who is Germanic.  He is   a tall  smartly dressed charismatic man in his early forties. He wears a suit, waistcoat under  a short wool coat  with a pork pie hat. He collides  with Jo as she reads a discarded newspaper  and drops his books and Jo helps him to gather them up before he dashes  towards a house which  is the Boarding House they seek.

Marmee leaves her  and Jo enters the house,  clutching her  battered suitcase and carpet bag. The parlour is  a comfortable, but shabby room  with two  untidy   tall book cases on each side of the room  and four  chairs and a table between them  at the rear of the room. A chaise longue is sited on the left. We hear the sounds of a German  lesson in progress before the Professor flies out, muttering and exasperated with his students before he rejoins them after Jo takes off her coat to reveal a pink  long sleeved gown. She   returns the book to him and he  finally introduces himself.

Jo is sitting  in the Parlour in New York, at a small desk on the right,   dressed in a pink long sleeved  full skirted long dress under her scribbling suit of a  brown wrap around  coat  and  large tatty soft  hat  with the  bearded Professor in a   grey waistcoat  suit  sitting on the chaise longue. Aunt March  makes her usual  loud entrance dressed in a hooped blue  long dress,  green caped coat, gloves and poke bonnet.  Jo immediately divests herself of her suit.

 A trip abroad is mentioned and Jo expects to go with Aunt March, but that is not to be. Amy comes in dressed in a  rich  velvet  burgundy caped coat and bare headed to bid farewell to her sister.

The Professor rejoins Jo   to listen to her anger and frustration after  their departure.

 Amy, dressed as before,  is  reciting a letter from her cabin to the sound of waves and seagulls  and then later from London. Jo and the Professor are reading the letter sitting together on the chaise longue.

Jo and the Professor are reading Shakespeare together and end up dancing around the parlour before Amy  writes another   letter, this time from   Paris.

It seems to be 3 years later and Amy  is in Paris standing outside a ballroom in front of a rich red curtain     and she  removes her  cloak to reveal  a beautiful lemon  taffeta  off the shoulder   hooped evening dress and she unexpectedly  espies Laurie looking decidedly older, dishevelled, disgruntled and  asleep  on a chaise longue clutching a bottle of cognac.   He is surprised to see  her and how elegant she is and they converse before he drunkenly sways out  and  Aunt March dressed in  a beautiful evening gown  finds Amy and  she    is  whisked  away  to meet Fred Vaughan.

Jo,  dressed in a crisp  white blouse with a dark tie and   a full red belted skirt and hair in a tight bun rushes into  the Parlour to join Freidrich who is standing by the small desk on the right. She dashes over to the chaise longue to shuffle numerous papers  before crossing to the desk where Freidrich    hands her a letter from home. They feel a mutual attraction until Freidrich sees a copy of the Weekly Volcano and its contents  which causes some  heated debate.  She eventually reads the letter and hurries from the room.

 Back in the March House and the  girls’  father  has returned  from the War although he is not seen and Jo, and  Marmee in her customary blouse , skirt and bibbed apron  and Meg dressed in a flowery dress  and   6 months pregnant appear and discuss Beth’s health and she is lying on the sofa where Jo joins her after they are left alone.  They embrace as a single beam of light drops on to Beth  on the sofa  Tears are shed before and Beth  gets up and drifts away into  the darkness before it lightens and Marmee quietly closes the lid on Beth’s piano and encourages Jo to continue with her writing.

An imagined scene including Beth results in Jo crying but ready to write again.

We move to the  Professor dressed as before  receiving a parcel containing a manuscript. He smiles as he opens it.

 In the March House and it is  a few months later and Christmas again. We hear babies crying and Jo, reluctantly,  and Marmee  are each carrying a baby  and they put them in their wicker crib before Meg joins them. An unexpected old friend  climbs through the window and Amy   and Aunt March  arrive and a revelation is revealed.

A family scene around the piano ensues before another unexpected visitor calls and a  misunderstanding is quickly rectified before the story reaches its satisfactory conclusion.

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The next audio performance will be Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dream Coat on Saturday June 28th at 2.30p.m.  preceded by a touch tour at 1.30.p.m.

It will be captioned for the deaf on Thursday June 26th @7.30pm