

all articles

- [LITTLE WOMEN - THE BROADWAY MUSICAL Brings its Timeless Story to Cleveland](#)
- [A Few Minutes with Maureen McGovern](#)
- [Little Women - From Page to Stage](#)
- [Louisa May Alcott - The Woman Behind the "Women"](#)
- [Who Are the "Little Women?"](#)
- [Fun Facts About Little Women](#)
- [A Note from the Vice President](#)
- [Pre-Show Talks/Post-Show Chats](#)

feedback

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credits

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LITTLE WOMEN - THE BROADWAY MUSICAL BRINGS ITS TIMELESS STORY TO CLEVELAND



National Touring Company, Little Women - The Broadway Musical. © 2005 Joan Marcus.

LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL, the remarkable new production based on the classic novel by Louisa May Alcott, is coming to the Palace Theatre at Playhouse Square Center May 9-21, as part of the McDonald Financial Group Broadway Series. *The New York Sun* calls it “...a Broadway musical for the whole family,” and *TIME Magazine* describes it as “skillfully adapted...unpretentious and warmhearted.” Headlining the tour direct from Broadway is recording, concert, and theater star **Maureen McGovern**.

McGovern’s portrayal of Marmee, the family matriarch, garnered her a Drama Desk Award nomination and glowing reviews on Broadway. “Superb!” said *The Wall Street Journal*. “Maureen McGovern, with her strong, vibrant singing and glowing maternal warmth, is a lovely Marmee in every way!” praised *The Star-Ledger*.

McGovern previously starred on Broadway in *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Nine and Three Penny Opera*, and in the national tour of *The King and I*. She appeared in the films *The Towering Inferno* and *Airplane!* and also in the DreamWorks animated video *Joseph: King of Dreams*. A two-time Grammy nominee, her 25 recordings include critically-acclaimed tributes to George Gershwin, Alan and Marilyn Bergman, Harold Arlen and the Oscar-winning gold record “The Morning After.”

Based on Alcott’s own family experiences, **LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL** follows the adventures of Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy March as they grow up in Civil War America. The beloved story of the March sisters is timeless and deals with issues as relevant today as when it was written. Now, this wonderful narrative has been brought to life as an exhilarating new musical filled with glorious music, dancing, and heart. **LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL** is

the complete theatrical experience, promising a performance filled with laughter, a lifting of the spirit and, perhaps, even a few tears.

Playing the fiery-spirited Jo March is **Kate Fisher**. Fisher has been seen as Cosette in *Les Miserables* both on Broadway and with its Third National Tour. The eldest March sister, Meg, is played by **Renee Brna**, who joins the show after finishing the First National Tour of *Oklahoma!*. **Autumn Hurlbert** plays the kind and gentle Beth March; this is her first Broadway tour. Regional theater has seen her in *Side Show*, *She Loves Me*, *Carousel*, and *Company*. Playing Amy, the youngest of the March girls, is **Gwen Hollander**. Some of her recent credits include Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, *Fiddler on the Roof* and the national tours of *Footloose* and *Titanic*.

Louisa Flaningam plays crotchety Aunt March. She has been seen as Fastrada in the national tour of *Pippin* and in the Broadway productions of *The Most Happy Fella*, *Guys and Dolls* and *The Magic Show*. **Michael Minarik** plays Meg's love interest John Brooke. He has appeared in the national tours of *Urinetown*, *Phantom of the Opera* and *The Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber*. **Stephen Patterson** plays Laurie, the March sisters' close friend and neighbor; he joins *Little Women* from the Broadway and touring production of *Les Miserables*.

Reprising the role he originated on Broadway is **Robert Stattel**, playing the March's neighbor Mr. Laurence. He has appeared in over a dozen plays on Broadway, including *Philadelphia Here I Come* and *Sherlock Holmes*. **Andrew Varela** joins the tour from the Broadway production, playing the role of Professor Bhaer. Before *Little Women* he starred as Jean Valjean in the Broadway cast of *Les Miserables*.

Produced by **Ken Gentry**, **Randall Wreghitt** and **Dani Davis**, LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL features book by **Allan Knee**, music by **Jason Howland**, lyrics by **Mindi Dickstein** and choreography by **Michael Lichtefeld**. This creative team must be doing it right—just listen to what *The Columbus Dispatch* has to say about them: “Allan Knee has faithfully adapted the story about a stoic mother and four daughters struggling to live while the man of the house is away fighting the Civil War, but the condensation shifts the focus more to Jo, Alcott's tomboyish alter ego. Jason Howland's tuneful music and Mindi Dickstein's simple lyrics serve the story and the characters while evoking a homespun 19th century atmosphere that is echoed by Michael Litchfield's folksy choreography.”

The musical is directed by **Susan H. Schulman**, the Tony Award and Outer Critics Circle Award winner with an extensive and impressive resume (*The Sound of Music*, *The Boys From Syracuse*, *Allegro*, *The Secret Garden*, *Sweeney Todd*). *The Chicago Sun-Times* found the touring production of LITTLE WOMEN - THE BROADWAY MUSICAL “...sensitively directed by Susan H. Schulman, with many of the trademarks of her earlier hit *The Secret Garden*.”

Perhaps the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* puts it best: “The Broadway musical LITTLE WOMEN is carving a niche for itself on a national tour. It is sprinkled

throughout with affecting moments that please, sadden or tickle the heart. If it were a book, it might be called a good read. Of course, it is a book as well. One could say that its transformation to musical theater...is a success!”

LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL SYNOPSIS

Act One

The year is 1866, and as *LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL* opens, we see Jo March enacting her *OPERATIC TRAGEDY, PART ONE* for Professor Bhaer, her neighbor in New York. Her “blood and guts” saga is clearly not to his taste. He suggests she is capable of more refined writing. After he leaves, Jo wonders if her writing was *BETTER* years before, back home in Concord, Massachusetts.

Reminiscing on those days, Jo reflects on her life years earlier, and we venture back to the March family attic of two years previous. Jo is rehearsing her sisters in her new Christmas play. Each sister is trying to find something to be happy about that Christmas; it is difficult with their father away serving in the Civil War, and there is no money for gifts or a Christmas tree. Jo promises that they will no longer want for anything once she is a successful writer, and they will all realize *OUR FINEST DREAMS*.

As Jo runs off to fulfill one of those dreams, Marmee, the loving, devoted mother to the March girls, comes home with a letter from their father. As she reads the letter, she reflects on how her life is *HERE ALONE*.

To help remedy the family’s dire straits, Jo has begun helping her Aunt March. Her aunt worries that Jo is not the lady she needs to be to take her place in proper society. Jo would like to tell Aunt March just what she thinks of society, but Aunt March offers to take Jo with her to Europe—if Jo can change her ways. “*COULD YOU?*” she asks. Jo answers that she could change if she wanted to.

Time passes, and older sister Meg has one of her dreams realized: she and Jo are invited to a Valentine’s Ball. While younger sister Beth is happy for them, the youngest, Amy, is jealous. Meg worries what to say to potential suitors. “*I’D BE DELIGHTED*” is what Marmee suggests. When the glamorous evening arrives, Amy tries to go in Jo’s place. When Marmee won’t allow her, Amy demonstrates her unhappiness by burning Jo’s manuscripts.

At the ball, Jo and Meg run into their neighbor Laurie, who is accompanied by his tutor Mr. Brooke. Meg is soon smitten by Mr. Brooke, and they leave to dance. Laurie professes his need for friends, and soon he asks Jo to *TAKE A CHANCE ON ME*. His good nature wins Jo over, and she agrees to take that chance.

After the ball, Amy’s jealousy spurs a fight with Jo. Marmee intervenes and scolds Amy for her actions. Jo is still getting over the sting of her row with Amy as she starts to express her feelings through her writing. Time passes, and we

find Laurie inviting the sisters to a skating race. Beth offers her skates to Amy, as Amy has outgrown her own.

Intent upon staying in the house while the others go skating, Beth sits at the piano, out of tune as it is. Grumpy Mr. Laurence, looking for his grandson, comes upon her musical attempts. She soon softens his hard heart, and they find themselves playing a duet *OFF TO MASSACHUSETTS*. He leaves, but not before inviting Beth to come play his in-tune grand piano next door.

Coming in from skating, we see that Amy has fallen through the ice and was rescued by Laurie. Having faced this life or death situation, Jo and Amy resolve their differences, and Jo swears Laurie in as an honorary member of the March family, officially making them *FIVE FOREVER*.

Marmee receives word that her husband is ill, and she makes plans to go to Washington to tend to him; however, she is short on funds. Jo saves the day, coming up with money to pay her fare. Marmee is barely gone when Aunt March and Jo have a heated exchange, and Aunt March withdraws her offer of the European trip. Instead, she turns her focus on Amy, to make her into the model society lady that she wished Jo had become.

Before Jo can settle the matter, Mr. Brooke comes in to announce his enlistment in the Union Army, and to ask for Meg's hand in marriage so he can be *MORE THAN I AM*. All of this seems so sudden to Jo, who questions Meg's loyalty to the family; after all, they had sworn to remain together forever. Jo's world is starting to change significantly.

A few weeks later while visiting Jo in her attic, Laurie presents news and a declaration. The news: With Mr. Brooke at war, he is headed to college in Boston. The declaration: He is in love with Jo, and wants to marry her!

All this is too much for Jo. She refuses his advances, sends him away, and questions her future. She dreams of moving to New York City, but wonders if she will be able to find her way without her sisters or her best friend. As Act One ends, she vows her life will be *ASTONISHING*, no matter what!

Act Two

Back to the "present"—1866, in New York. The war has ended, and Jo's landlady, Mrs. Kirk, and neighbor Professor Bhaer are holding a telegram for Jo. Before reading it, however, Jo has her own news to share: She has sold her first story, her *OPERATIC TRAGEDY*, to *THE WEEKLY VOLCANO PRESS* (only now it's better, thanks to the Professor's advice!).

Once Jo comes down to earth, Mrs. Kirk remembers the telegram: Beth is gravely ill. Jo packs to leave New York immediately, hastily makes her goodbyes, and heads for Concord, Massachusetts.

Back in Concord, Mr. Laurence has his own plan to make Beth well: he moves his piano into the March home. Beth and the family are overwhelmed by his generosity, and soon all join in another rendition of *OFF TO MASSACHUSETTS*.

Jo makes plans to take Beth and Marmee to Cape Cod, and she sends a note to Professor Bhaer explaining her plans to him. She asks him what's new in New York. He tries over and over, but just can't quite find the way to tell her *HOW I AM*.

On Cape Cod Jo splurges her meager earnings on her mother and sister. Everyone puts up a brave front concerning Beth's health, but Jo and Beth privately admit to one another that *SOME THINGS ARE MEANT TO BE*.

Back in Concord, Amy and Aunt March return from Europe. Much has changed. Meg is now a mother, Jo is now a published writer, and Beth has died. Things are different for Amy, too: she is engaged to Laurie, who consoled her in Europe when Beth died. Together they break the news to Jo; after all, it was *THE MOST AMAZING THING*.

Later, Jo asks Marmee how she has been able to handle the loss of Beth. Simply, Marmee insists Beth will always be with them, and that Jo, too, will find she has *DAYS OF PLENTY*. Jo takes in what her mother has said and finally sees how she can go on—and how she can keep Beth's memory alive. Jo begins work on what is to become her greatest achievement: Little Women. *THE FIRE WITHIN ME* fills her attic and her heart, as she brings her family to life on paper.

The day of Amy and Laurie's wedding arrives. Jo and Aunt March finally resolve their differences, and Aunt March promises to leave her house to Jo, with the suggestion that Jo open a school. Her generosity touches Jo in ways she never expected. All of a sudden, a confused Professor Bhaer enters, looking for Jo. He apologizes for arriving on Amy and Laurie's wedding day, but he brings good news: Jo's manuscript has been bought—she is finally a novelist! He also has a declaration to make: He bought a kite!

However, from this point on, he also proceeds to pour his heart out to Jo, and tells her how he's finally ready to share his *SMALL UMBRELLA IN THE RAIN*.

Jo, always skeptical, questions their chances. Theirs would be a new kind of relationship for a new world. Could it work? Could it possibly work? *SOMETIMES WHEN YOU DREAM* just might provide the answer.

A FEW MINUTES WITH MAUREEN MCGOVERN

Even on the telephone, **Maureen McGovern** has that kind of voice that makes a listener melt. It's a voice that defies description, especially to the "untrained" ear that I have, but it's easy to hear why she has been called "The Stradivarius Voice." She handles pop, jazz and Broadway tunes with ease, but can easily move into the coloratura soprano range when needed.



Maureen McGovern
© Deborah Feingold

It's the Broadway style she's using most right now; after winning wonderful reviews for her performance in Broadway's *Little Women*, which included her show-stopping rendition of "Days of Plenty," Maureen McGovern is currently sharing her character of Marmee with audiences around the country in the 32-city national tour of the musical based on the Louisa May Alcott novel.

You can hear the true joy in her voice as she starts the conversation with "I'm enjoying it extremely! And I can't believe that with tonight's show (in Baltimore) we'll be down to 11 cities left out of 32 on a year-long tour. Toward the end we play for a month at the Kennedy Center, then Milwaukee and Los Angeles, then we'll wrap it up in Portland at the end of August." The tour started in San Diego in August of 2005.

The Youngstown native has enjoyed the circuitous route the show has taken through Ohio, her favorite state. "We played Columbus last November, we'll be in Cleveland in May, then we'll play Cincinnati in late June and early July. I always have relatives or friends who pop up from all over Ohio when we're nearby, and I love it!"

She also loves the warm reception the show is getting all over the country. "More often than not, productions in New York have to be 'edgy' to be successful. Well, edgy we ain't," she laughs. "The show mirrors the beloved story that people have read for generations. This musical is the stuff of life, how we move on, and how we triumph," she explains. "You leave the theater so inspired and fulfilled."

In *LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL*, McGovern plays Marmee, mother of the four March sisters. Her husband is away in the Union Army during the

Civil War, leaving her to raise her four highly “individualized” daughters on her own. “Marmee is the essence of motherhood, and she faces the universal dilemma of mothers trying to be everything to everybody. She pours out her fears, her frustrations and her love in the wistful ‘Here Alone’ that is the letter she writes to her far-away husband.”

Later, after the death of her daughter Beth, Marmee sings “Days of Plenty” to encourage daughter Jo. “It’s similar to ‘Morning After,’” she explains, making a reference to the Academy Award winning anthem from the film *The Poseidon Adventure*. “It’s a powerful, hopeful, inspirational kind of song, a song of hope and reconciliation for Jo to try and go on with her life and be all she can be after the loss of her sister.”

“Music therapy in motion” is the way she describes the impact of “Days of Plenty.” She has heard from audience members who have thanked her for helping them through rough spots regarding the death of a son, a daughter, a spouse. One particular incident remains vividly clear: at an after-show discussion, a teacher with a group of seventh-graders told McGovern that one of her students had recently lost her brother. She didn’t know how she was going to go on. “The teacher said, ‘I watched the very moment Marmee sang “Days of Plenty” and saw it register in her face that you go on with your life in honor of the person that you’ve lost.’”

The sense of family that is both in the story and among the cast is something McGovern cherishes. “My Broadway family was incredible, and I loved them very much!” she exclaims. “But the road show group also bonded as a family immediately as well,” she continues. Although her four daughters were new to the show, two members of the touring company came along with McGovern from the Broadway run: Robert Stattel as grumpy Mr. Laurence and Andrew Varela as Professor Bhaer. “Having some familiar faces helped, of course, but we all bonded quickly!”

One particular outing helped to cement the already-good relationship among the girls playing the daughters and their “mother” Maureen McGovern. In January “I made a pilgrimage to Orchard House in Concord with my stage daughters, just the five of us,” she said. “The Alcott family moved almost 30 times, but that was where they lived the longest. And that’s where *Little Women* was written.”

“We wept all morning,” laughs McGovern. “Being in those rooms you could feel the walls talking. And not just talking: the Alcott sister May, who becomes Amy in the book, was a very prolific artist. She was allowed to draw on the walls of Orchard House and her paintings were there, too.

“I could see the house through my stage children’s eyes,” she continues, “and that week - and hopefully since - our performances have been even richer!”

We talked a little about McGovern’s Cleveland connections and once again that beautiful voice had a bit of a beautiful laugh. As it turns out, McGovern was

actually “discovered” singing at a Ramada Inn outside Cleveland in 1972. Her newfound producer sent out tapes of her live performance, but she says “Every record company turned me down except 20th Century Records. They signed me sight unseen.”

One month later she recorded “The Morning After.” And take a wild guess where it was recorded: yep, right here in good ol’ Cleveland, right above the Agora, at Agency Recording.

“The writers wrote it for Barbra Streisand and I thank her profusely for turning it down,” she says of the award-winning song. She informs me that she is equally proud of a recent effort: she is among the singers represented on the CD “Songs From the Neighborhood: The Music of Mr. Rogers,” which won the 2006 Grammy for best musical album for children. “What I love about Fred Rogers’ music is its simplicity and just honest, life-affirming quality,” she adds.

I notice certain words and phrases running through our nearly 40-minute phone conversation: “life-affirming...music therapy...healing power of song.” Our conversation naturally turned to McGovern’s “Works of Heart” Foundation. It’s McGovern’s way of giving back to the worldwide community. It’s music that provides “powerful, musical milligrams of hope, with daily doses of inspiring music and affirmations to counteract fear, isolation and despair - and to provide healing comfort, stress release and inspiration for patients and caregivers. From pediatric cancer patients, to Alzheimer’s patients, to emotionally exhausted caregivers, to those suffering from grieving and loss, the application is endless and the need is great.”

She explains the power of music for everyone, and how it is even more powerful for the sick and/or the caregivers of the sick. “For the past several years I have been an Artist Spokesperson for the American Music Therapy Association, ‘singing the praises’ of professional music therapists and championing the therapeutic power of music to aid in the healing process. As an MDA National Board Member and also a 25-year volunteer for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, I have learned that hope is very contagious.”

One of her favorite people—in fact one she calls the Mother Teresa of Cleveland—is Deforia Lane, Director of Music Therapy for the Ireland Cancer Center, Rainbow Babies & Children’s Hospital and the Cleveland Hospital Association. McGovern has often gone on rounds with Lane and finds her a “phenomenal mentor and huge influence on me.”

Lane is quick to return the kudos to McGovern for her popular, healing, life-affirming CD: “It’s as though you have an abiding love and sanctity for each word and you refuse to just ‘sing’ it, but rather shape and create an exquisite landscape for each one, then setting it free to embrace the eyes and ears of those in its path.”

Maureen McGovern: “The Stradivarius Voice”... the Broadway star... the humanitarian... the care-giver... Marmee in LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY

MUSICAL. She's so many things to so many people that she's currently living out of a suitcase, having sold her Hollywood home and letting her New York digs go just recently. She's not concerned, though... she is so happy doing all that she does, and she looks forward to the next chapter of life this fall. We hope it will bring her to Cleveland even more.

LITTLE WOMEN - FROM PAGE TO STAGE



Stephen Patterson (left) and Kate Fisher, Little Women - The Broadway Musical. © 2005 Joan Marcus.

For a musical to be a hit, generally there are two basic elements that are required: a good book and a good score. Acting, singing, dance, production values figure in there, too, but the book and the score really make it fly.

Take a look at “the book” for LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL: the much-loved classic tale by Louisa May Alcott, published in September, 1868, concerning the lives and loves of four sisters growing up during the American Civil War. It’s around 500 pages of some of the most popular literature of its period, and while some of its issues may seem outdated, many of the trials of the sisters are still relevant today as evidenced by its continued following.

The show’s creators, especially Allan Knee who wrote the play’s book, had the Herculean task of taking a 500-page book and synthesizing it into a two-and-a-half hour musical onstage. They decided to focus on Jo’s journey in this retelling, but have managed to keep the “flavor” of the novel, maintaining its inspiration and universal appeal.

Alcott’s original work explores the overcoming of character flaws through application of the Bible, which each girl receives as a Christmas present in the early chapters. Each of the March girls displays a major character flaw: Meg, avarice; Jo, anger; Beth, crippling shyness; Amy, selfishness. They overcome their flaws through lessons learned the hard way: the pretty Meg becomes discontented with the children she teaches; boyish Jo loses her temper regularly; the golden-haired schoolgirl Amy is inclined towards affectation. Beth, however, who keeps the house is always kind and gentle. Even as young women the girls must work out these flaws in order to become archetypal mothers, wives, sisters and citizens.

LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL is not the first adaptation of *Little Women* for stage or screen. The Christian theme of the novel was usually deemphasized for film versions, and it is completely non-existent in the screen version produced by Winona Ryder and starring Susan Sarandon. Of the many popular versions, the four-hour miniseries with Susan Dey, Meredith Baxter Birney and Eve Plumb is considered the most faithful to the novel. Well-known adaptations include:

1933 film: Katharine Hepburn as Jo, Spring Byington as Marmee

1949 film: Elizabeth Taylor as Amy, June Allyson as Jo, Janet Leigh as Meg, Margaret O'Brien as Beth, Mary Astor as Marmee and Peter Lawford as Laurie

1978 film: Meredith Baxter Birney as Meg, Susan Dey as Jo, Eve Plumb as Beth, William Shatner as Friedrich Bhaer, Greer Garson as Aunt March and Robert Young as Grandpa James Laurence

1994 film: Susan Sarandon as Marmee, Winona Ryder as Jo, Kirsten Dunst as Amy, Claire Danes as Beth and Christian Bale as Laurie

According to the Internet Movie Database, seven additional versions were made as early as 1917 and as recently as 2001.

Interestingly, several Japanese anime versions have been produced, a 1980 TV special and a 1981 TV series. In 1987 a Japanese animation studio created yet another version which is the most successful and widely regarded as the best of all anime adaptations of the story.

In 1998 the book was adapted as an opera by composer Mark Adamo.

In January, 2005, the Broadway musical starring Maureen McGovern opened, playing through May, 2005.

In the fall of 2005, LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL began its tour and will play in 32 cities through the end of 2006.

Through all of its incarnations it still remains the story of *Little Women*, the story of the sisters' growing maturity and wisdom and the search for the contentedness of family life.

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT - THE WOMAN BEHIND THE “WOMEN”



*National Touring Company, Little Women -
The Broadway Musical. © 2005 Joan Marcus.*

Louisa May Alcott is primarily remembered for her children’s classics, especially for *Little Women* and its sequels. She was, however, a multi-faceted personality, possessed of a deeply independent spirit and reforming energy. Contemporary research has revealed that she also wrote works aimed at adult audiences, though under the pseudonym of A.M. Barnard. She was active as a nurse and a suffragette.

Louisa May Alcott, the second daughter of Amos Bronson Alcott and Abigail “Abba” May, was born in Germantown (now a part of Philadelphia), Pennsylvania, on November 29, 1832. In 1840 the family moved to Concord, Massachusetts. Louisa enjoyed acting out plays that she had written with her sisters, and also spent time with family friends Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. In 1843 the Alcott family took part in an experimental communal village known as The Fruitlands. Here Bronson Alcott wished to further his beliefs in transcendentalism and bring his daughters a greater understanding of nature. Unfortunately the project failed and the family returned to Concord in 1845. Louisa later wrote of this experience in *Transcendental Wild Oats*.

Despite his intellectual and social standing, Bronson Alcott was not a good provider, and the family moved back to Boston in 1849. Feeling more and more responsible for her family’s financial needs, Louisa started taking on a variety of jobs. She and her elder sister Anna taught small children and mended and washed laundry in an effort to help provide for the growing Alcott family.

In 1852 Louisa published her first poem “Sunlight” in *Peterson’s Magazine* under the pseudonym Flora Fairfield. Her first published short story was “The Rival Painters.” Her first book, *Flower Fables*, was published in 1855. At this

point, the Alcott family moved to Walpole, New Hampshire, but Louisa stayed on in Boston to further her literary career. The third Alcott daughter, Lizzie, contracted scarlet fever and her illness forced the Alcotts back to Concord where Emerson purchased Orchard House for the family. Lizzie died in 1856 and Anna was married soon after. Louisa returned to Concord in 1857 to keep her mother company.

She went to Washington, DC, in 1862 to serve as a Civil War nurse. Like many other nurses, Louisa contracted typhoid fever, and although she recovered, she would suffer the effects of mercury poisoning for the rest of her life. Her stay in Washington prompted her to write *Hospital Sketches* which was published in 1863, followed by *Moods* in 1864.

At this point Louisa's publisher, Thomas Niles, told her that he wanted "a girl's story" from her. This was the turning point in Louisa's literary career. She wrote furiously for two and half months and produced *Little Women* based on her own experiences of growing up with three sisters. The novel, published on September 30, 1868, was an instant success, selling more than 2,000 copies immediately. The publisher begged for a second volume. *Good Wives*, the second volume of *Little Women* was released on April 14, 1869, and more than 13,000 copies sold at once. Louisa's story of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy had launched her into literary stardom and helped to alleviate the family's financial problems.

Louisa and her youngest sister May headed off to Europe in 1870 for a break. The next few years saw her career prosper rapidly as book after book was published and enjoyed by a huge audience of young readers. *An Old Fashioned Girl* was published in 1870, *Little Men* in 1871, followed by *Work* in 1873, *Eight Cousins* in 1874, and its sequel *Rose in Bloom* in 1876. Also during this time, Louisa became active in the women's suffrage movement, writing for "The Women's Journal." In 1879 she became the first woman in Concord to register to vote in the village's school committee election.

Unfortunately, Louisa's mother's health was failing, and she died in 1877. Yet sorrow was not to last long in the Alcott family, as May announced her marriage to a wealthy European in 1878. May gave birth the following year, November 8, 1879, to Louisa May Nieriker. Sadly, complications arose, and May died on December 29 of the same year. Her dying wish was for Louisa to care for her namesake, Lulu. In 1880 Louisa took Lulu to Boston, and in 1885 she moved what remained of her family into elegant Louisburg Square in Boston.

Though she continued to produce books for younger readers, Louisa also wrote adult thrillers and novellas such as *A Woman's Power* and *A Modern Mephistopheles*. Still writing as best she could, for the mercury poisoning she had received early in life was beginning to take its toll, Louisa published *Jo's Boys* in 1886. Her father's health finally failed and he died on March 4, 1888. Two days later, at the age of 56, Louisa May Alcott died in Boston, leaving behind a legacy of many books which would be admired and cherished for generations to come.

WHO ARE THE “LITTLE WOMEN?”



*National Touring Company, Little Women -
The Broadway Musical. © 2005 Joan Marcus.*

When **LITTLE WOMEN—THE BROADWAY MUSICAL** takes the Palace stage May 9-21, the story made famous by Louisa May Alcott will come to life, and the little women of the March family will sing, dance, entertain, and move us to laughter and tears. But who are these powerful characters, really?

Josephine March - Jo, the second oldest of the March sisters, is the heroine of our production tale; she is loosely based on the author, Louisa May Alcott. One of the first “modern” women portrayed in literature, Jo challenges societal constraints and strives to define herself not just as a wife and mother, but also as a professional writer. She is rebellious, outspoken, and impatient with the limitations put upon women of her time. Remember this is 1868, but her character sounds like she could be from 1968.

Meg March - The oldest March sister, Meg is named after their mother, and takes after her in many ways. She is nurturing and compassionate, and though she has a real desire for material luxuries, her virtuous nature is proven when she chooses true love over riches by marrying a man with little money or material goods.

Beth March - The third sister, Beth is the typical old-fashioned heroine. She is musically talented, eager to please, and is ladylike and shy. She and Jo are both determined to hold their family together and are very close.

Amy March - Amy is the baby of the family. She is comfortable and very much “in her own skin” playing the role of a lady. She is popular, artistic, and loves

material possessions. Her attitudes are in direct contrast to Jo, each with wildly opposite views on how a woman should live her life.

Marmee - The family matriarch, Marmee is a loving, devoted mother to the March girls. She provides stability and a strong moral center for the girls.

Aunt March - Aunt March is the grouchy great-aunt of the March girls. She is rigid and formal; she believes that a woman's place in life is to serve her husband and have his children. She does not think a woman should display an independent spirit, which, obviously, leads to tension between her and Jo.

The "Honorary" March: Laurie Laurence - Laurie is the March's charming, wealthy, handsome next-door neighbor. Laurie shares Jo's feelings resisting societal norms and mores. His grandfather wants him to work in the business world and play the part of the "traditional" man, but Laurie is not interested. He much prefers music, theater and travel to the everyday routine of a businessman.

FUN FACTS ABOUT LITTLE WOMEN



*National Touring Company, Little Women -
The Broadway Musical. © 2005 Joan Marcus.*

Did you know that *LITTLE WOMEN*:

- Has never been out of print since its first publishing in 1868?
- Is nearly always in the “Top 10” of most-read books, frequently right behind the Bible?
- Was voted one of the top 21 books in the BBC’s “Big Read” competition (November, 2003) for the all-time favorite books of UK residents?
- Was translated into a dozen foreign languages in Louisa May Alcott’s lifetime, and now appears in more than 50 different languages, including Bengali, Chinese, Indonesian, Swedish, Turkish and Urdu?
- Netted Louisa May Alcott more than \$200,000 from the million copies sold in her lifetime, making her a millionaire by today’s currency standards?
- Is read today by approximately one-third of all girls ages 10-17, is often on the reading lists of college literature classes and is required reading in Japan for students of American History?
- Has been made into three major motion pictures, countless stage adaptations, operettas, ballets and several made-for-television movies (including one where Beth actually recovers from her illness!) and Japanese anime?
- Popularized the names of Jo[séphine] and Amy in the 20th Century, with many families of four daughters naming their girls after the Marches?

- Inspired these words from a *Yankee Magazine* reporter in the 1920s?

[The March family and their home] had arisen in people's minds like a stage lighting up, and a babble of living voices, and so remains for their lifetimes - a family as near and dear as any really known in life. Something in the magical words, *Little Women*, draws people everywhere. It's a bigger thing in people's hearts than even we'd realized. Despite being written over 50 years ago, they still ring true.

A NOTE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT - THEATRICALS

Although it is only coincidence that *Little Women* is here around Mother's Day, I think you would agree that it is an appropriate one. After seeing the show, you might be inclined to reflect a bit differently on Mother's Day this year-- not just on moms in your own circle, but on several generations of mothers, and their diverse contributions to society.



Gina Vernaci,
Vice President - Theatricals

Little Women follows the lives of the March sisters: the eldest, Meg; the frail, but saintly Beth; the baby, Amy; and last but certainly not least, spunky tomboy Jo. We see the sisters--Jo, in particular--as they grow, change, deal with love, and even death. Although the story takes place 140 years ago, the characters and their relationships with one another--siblings, parent/child, friends/lovers--are timeless.

Another theme that continues to resonate with increasing intensity is the role of females in society. *Little Women* is a true rendition of what life was like for women during The Civil War. Here were four young girls under their mother's sole tutelage, their father having left to fight in the war. They were poor and faced great difficulties, but they had each other. The characters in *Little Women* simultaneously demonstrate how far women have come, and paradoxically, how little has changed.

While her sisters maintained conventional female roles, only Jo attempted to break out and become something else. She dreamed of becoming a soldier and a writer; and even cut her hair short (a near scandal during that period.) Today, Jo would not merely be accepted, she would be more the standard. The expectation nowadays is that girls behave more like boys: play with the same toys, compete in the same sports, and excel in the same educational subjects. All these things are expected to help them advance in school and their careers.

Now, consider Marmee March (played in this production by the incomparable Maureen McGovern, who originated the role in the recent Broadway premiere). Not only did Marmee single-handedly care for her daughters in very trying circumstances; she also served as the emotional glue that held the family together. In many ways, it is still that way today. Society never stops raising the bar for women, it seems. They are expected to shoulder most of the responsibilities that come with caring for children and households, have careers, volunteer at school and in the community, and perhaps even care for their own aging parents. Yet, more and more, they are being raised to act like men.

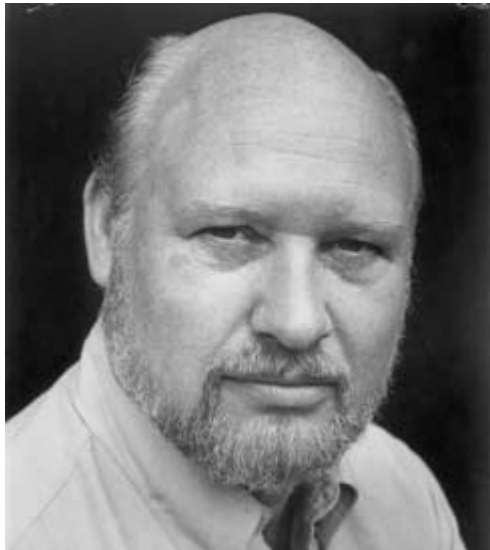
So it begs the question: what progress have we really made? No doubt, American women have much more freedom and opportunity today as compared to 140 years ago—but at what cost? Certainly, there have been days when more than one gal would have gladly traded in her superhero uniform for the simplicity of days long ago. (No wonder early American hand-crafts like knitting, quilting, and embroidering are making a comeback.)

Of course, the “fairer sex” has a great deal to celebrate now, more than any previous generation. (A quick comparison of fashions alone are enough to make you want to get up and dance!) Happy Mother’s Day to all the moms in the audience. We hope this show provides a brief respite from your busy--and fulfilled-- lives.

Gina Vernaci
Vice President of Theatricals
Playhouse Square Foundation

Broadway Buzz Pre-Show Talks

The Broadway Buzz season continues with **LITTLE WOMEN - THE BROADWAY MUSICAL**. Join us in the Idea Center at Playhouse Square for our free **Pre-Show Talks** one hour prior to each performance and enjoy complimentary coffee while you hear the inside scoop on the show. You will explore how the beloved story of the March sisters was transformed into a Broadway musical with host **David Vosburgh**.



David Vosburgh

The Idea Center is located just two doors west of the Allen Theatre at 1375 Euclid Avenue.

Catch our **Post-Show Chats** with the Cast following both Thursday evening performances (**May 11th** and **18th**) in the Palace Theatre Upper Lobby.

Visit www.PlayhouseSquare.com/broadwaybuzz for information regarding the **Backstage Master Class** for **LITTLE WOMEN - THE BROADWAY MUSICAL**.