

Upstage Review sparkles in the classic tale of "Little Women"

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A Review

Theatre goers received a visual treat before the first line was uttered in Upstage Review's most recent offering, "Little Women" from the book by Louisa May Alcott. Upstage Review Director Laurie Swigart adapted the book to a play by careful and exhaustive research of the life and times in 1862, when the country was torn apart by the Civil War.

Although the group is well known for its creative set designs, "Little Women" surpassed its past achievements. Director Laurie Swigart expanded the stage at the Methodist Church Fellowship Hall, not only out, but up, putting a school room on one side and the library of the neighbor's home, on the other side.

The book from which the show evolved was written in 1867. It is the fictional story of Louisa May Alcott and her sisters. It takes place during the Civil War and addresses the problems and issues of the day, including that of a family virtually left to fend for itself when the husband and father is called to war to serve as a chaplain to the troops.

Along with outstanding set constructions, Upstage Review is also known for its exquisite costuming, and "Little Women" is no exception. The beautiful Civil

War Era dress adds yet another special touch to this special show.

Casting is superb and cast members represented schools in Sparta, Tomah, LaCrosse, and Winona, MN.

The "Little Women" are played by Jennifer Lukasek as Meg, Julia MacCallum as Jo, Brianna Bowne as Beth, and Sara Lukasek as Amy.

Jennifer Lukasek is the perfect Meg. The oldest of the sisters, she is the one who is in a hurry to grow up. Her romance with the handsome and dashing John Brooke (TJ Smith) has all the sweetness of first love.

Jo (Julia MacCallum) on the other hand is a tomboy and an aspiring writer. Like Peter Pan, she doesn't want to grow up and she doesn't want things to change. MacCallum does an excellent job with the boisterous and sometimes pushy role of the second sister.

The scene in which Jo cuts her hair so she can sell it to a wig maker so she will have money to buy her mother a Christmas present, is especially touching and telling and MacCallum handled it well.

Beth (Brianna Bowne) is the shy one. She lives to serve others and ultimately pays with her life. Bowne is excellent in the role.

Sara Lukasek as the slightly spoiled and self absorbed Amy does an outstanding job with the role of the overemotional teen who is finding out the world doesn't always revolve around

her.

Liz Lefevre, a veteran of Upstage Review, once again displays her versatility, as Marmee, the mother of the March girls. Both her talent and her experience as an actress shine throughout her performance.

The story of the March family is told by way of a narrator (Karlle Amour). The family's struggles with finances, worry over their father and husband, and the ordinary stress and strain on teenagers of the era, are the formula for the action which ranges from romance to Jo's writing career.

Tim Smith, who plays Laurie, the nephew of the next door neighbor, does an excellent job with the role of the best buddy of Jo, who has visions of a more complex relationship.

Laurie's uncle, Mr. Laurence, was played by Upstage Review veteran and alumni Mark Lakowski. One only regretted the role was so small.

Amber Freeman was a show stealer in her performance of the critical, yet caring Aunt March.

Other performers included Kim Wood as Hannah, the housekeeper; Sarah MacCauley as Mrs. Davis; Jennifer Southworth as Mrs. Moffat and Pam Roatch as her daughter, Annie; and Robyn Schubert as Kate Vaughn.

Cudos to the director, cast and crew of "Little Women" for yet another outstanding production.