

—Slug:.....COMM-0844.arts.NEYT_LittleWomen
—Contributor.....Annie Landenberger
—Contributor email.....verbatimvt@gmail.com
—For section.....The Arts
—Format.....News - byline and dateline
—Dateline.....Brattleboro
—Article Number:.....42750

Notes from editor (not for publication):

—Line 18: Edit to prevent a flaming misread, which is so horrible it's kind of funny :).
—Line 42: There are so many plot points that I felt an editor's note might be appreciated.
—Line 109: Wiltermuth's Instagram profile says "they/them," and we've used those pronouns in a previous piece. Changed.

(Aside: It's ironic that *Little Women* takes place concurrently with the Festival of Miniatures.)

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

#####BEGIN HED#####

¹ 'Sisters going through life, growing up, being themselves,
² and finding how it is'

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

³ NEYT's Senior Company takes to the stage and digs deep
⁴ with an adaptation of 'Little Women' that is 'grounded in the
⁵ reality of doing'

#####END SUBHED#####

⁶ TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

7 While Louisa May Alcott wrote a host of novels, poems,
8 and short stories spanning sensationalist thrillers, feminist texts,
9 and journalistic reportage, she may be best known for *Little*
10 *Women*, a coming-of-age novel set in a Concord, Massachusetts-
11 like New England town during the U.S. Civil War.

12 New England Youth Theatre (NEYT) presents a scripted
13 version of this enduring story of family love and perseverance as
14 its 2025 holiday show.

15 Adapted by Marisha Chamberlain and directed by
16 NEYT's artistic director, Ben Stockman, *Little Women* presents the
17 four March sisters — Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy — and their mother,
18 Marmee, through the often-tough times faced when the man of
19 the house, Robert March, leaves home to serve as a Union
20 chaplain in the Civil War.

21 After they lost the family fortune, "their deep affection for
22 one another, innate hopefulness, and inner spark of creativity are
23 all they have to carry them through," states a NEYT press release.

24 Stockman points out that, although NEYT's is "the same
25 beloved story," this version of the play represents the first of
26 Alcott's two books. Chamberlain ends her adaptation when the
27 autobiographical Jo March, restless and a bit rebellious, rejects
28 the marriage proposal of Laurie Laurence, leaving her uncertain
29 of her future — but with options.

30 "Jo really has open possibilities at the end of this play,"
31 he says.

32 Stockman had been eager to stage *Little Women*, a show
33 that's been mounted a few times already by NEYT, "from the
34 moment I was hired" last year, he says. He chose it in part
35 because "I wanted to put on a show grounded in the reality of
36 doing and being on stage. That was exciting to me."

37 Thus, for many of the show's 15-player Senior Company
38 cast, the show requires learning some new skills: knitting,
39 embroidery, drawing, writing with a quill and ink, playing piano.

‘The story is one everyone can

find something in'

42 *[Editor's note: The following paragraphs contain what*
43 *contemporary audiences would call "spoilers." For the many*
44 *readers who are familiar with the plot of the 19th-century literary*
45 *classic, you'll likely appreciate the perspectives of the young cast*
46 *on their characters.]*

47 The March sisters are double cast in the NEYT
48 production. Rei Carpenter-Ranquist, a senior at Brattleboro Union
49 High School (BUHS), plays a Beth. At a recent rehearsal, she
50 spoke of the show: "This is a story from so long ago, and it's still
51 so present. It's just a bunch of sisters and their lives together and
52 how they bicker like all siblings, and when boy trouble comes
53 into play, they defend each other like nothing else has mattered
54 at all."

55 Rei is drawn to this, she adds, because "my mom is one
56 of four girls. I keep looking at this script and then at my mom and
57 my aunts, and I'm like, 'It's the same thing.' It's just sisters going
58 through life, growing up, being themselves, and finding how it is
59 in the world."

60 What's the biggest challenge she's faced in her role?
61 "Learning to play piano. Immediately, that's my answer," says Rei,
62 candid but clearly undaunted.

63 "I don't have a lick of piano experience I've been in
64 musical theater for a couple years," she adds. "I've taken choir
65 since I was little. I can read sheet music. I know music theory, but
66 I've never taken a piano lesson — and I'm playing a piano
67 prodigy."

68 Rei adds “one really big thing about the character of
69 Beth” that is important to her: “A lot of people, when they hear of
70 Beth, think, ‘Oh, she’s the one that dies,’ as if that’s her whole
71 thing.” But she’s more than that, Rei insists.

72 "She's growing up and becoming a person," she says.

73 "She had plans. She had ambitions in life. Even though she was
74 agoraphobic — she was terrified of people — she still had
75 dreams and ambitions. She had a future she wanted. And then
76 horrible tragedy happened."

77 It's not, says Rei, "that she was destined for death. It's that
78 death got in the way of her destiny and what she wanted to do in
79 life."

80 Veronica Cottrell introduces herself as one of the two
81 Megs. A homeschooled junior who has four sisters, Veronica's in
82 her third production with NEYT.

83 *"Little Women* is a beautiful story: It's so important to
84 come back to these tales of family and how we support each
85 other during harder times, and then celebrate together during
86 happier ones. I think the story is one everyone can find
87 something in."

88 Especially of the four sisters, she adds, "I think they show
89 us how we can each really be our own person."

90 Veronica defends Meg: "Meg wants only to get married?
91 No, and I think it often gets misconstrued like that. That that's the
92 end of her story, and that it's a bad thing. I think people forget
93 that it's Meg's choice, and that's what's beautiful."

94 And, she says, "Jo can write, but she won't get married,
95 and that's her choice. Meg can choose to marry. Being successful
96 in life doesn't have to look one way."

97 "Meg's story is beautiful because she starts the journey as
98 a girl who doesn't know what she wants: She's into this idea of
99 being rich and having fancy things, but then she's discovering as
100 she's going through these troubles that the things that really
101 matter aren't the material ones, but the emotional [things] and the
102 people next to you, the people who are kind to you."

103 "So that's what she values and that shouldn't be
104 considered any less," than the loftier aspirations of her sister, Jo,"
105 Veronica says.

106 She paraphrases a favorite line: "Just because my dreams
107 are different than yours doesn't mean they're any less important."

108 "That really represents Meg," Veronica says.

109 Anika Wiltermuth, a BUHS sophomore, plays Laurie's
110 tutor, John Brooke, in all performances. They observe: "I really
111 like how each cast chooses to do things differently and just how
112 differently they act."

113 When talking of the show's message, Anika adds that
114 they expect audience will be moved to "reflect on the March
115 family and how it relates to your own family: The script is much
116 more than the writing and the dreams part; it's more about the
117 family and the girls' relationships with each other."

118 Eva Lord, one of the Jos, started at NEYT in seventh
119 grade. She's now a junior at BUHS.

120 "I love the story of *Little Women*. The first time I saw the
121 script I was kind of skeptical because it wasn't exactly what I'd
122 been expecting," she says.

123 Some of the transitions are really quick, she adds, but the
124 more she's gone through the process, the more she's known the
125 cast can make it work.

126 When asked about creating her role, Eva says, "I'm not a
127 naturally angry person. And I think that Jo has a lot of anger
128 about different things, so portraying that and doing it
129 authentically, I think, is one of the more challenging things that
130 I'm facing."

131 Bibi Johnson, a BUHS senior, plays the other Jo. Before
132 anything else, Bibi shares: "I'm the worst knitter in the world."

133 With authentic presentation being an important part of
134 the directorial concept, having to do her part and knit on stage
135 has been a challenge.

136 "I already know how to use [pen and ink] from artistic
137 endeavors," she says, "and I know how to write. But I did not
138 know how to knit."

139 She's working on that in real time.

140 Bibi talks of *Little Women* as “being such strong and
141 relevant piece of literature,” noting how it presages 20th- and
142 21st-century issues of feminism.

143 Jo doesn’t want to be viewed as a typical woman of the
144 time when “a sense of subservience” is expected, as is adherence
145 to a “social norm where a woman’s expected to pretend to be
146 less” than what she really is, Bibi says.

147 “She says in the play that she wants to be a boy. It’s not
148 that she actually wants to be a boy; she wants the privileges that
149 come with that,” she adds.

150 “She wants to be able to just stand alone at a party and
151 not have anyone ask her to dance or ask her to get married and
152 just be able to live her life and pursue her own endeavors without
153 having to be tied down by some man.”

154 ‘A real connection’

155 The experience at NEYT has been an enduring influence
156 for many. Taz Hand, 13, who plays the suitor, Laurie, is son of
157 NEYT mainstay, Rebecca Waxman. “My mom has worked here
158 for a really long time,” he says, “so I’ve been helping out with
159 shows since I was 4 or 5. My mom directed, and I helped her.”

160 A student at Dummerston Elementary, Taz says of the
161 NEYT experience: “I feel like everyone here has a real
162 connection. It feels like a completely different community than at
163 school. And this is a great place to find [that] people like you and
164 find people who understand you and [find] people who aren’t as,
165 you know, judgy as you might find in a middle school.”

166 And it’s where a focus on life’s essentials and on being
167 truly human come to play in *Little Women*, featuring costume
168 design by Sandy Klein, set design by David Regan, lights and
169 sound by Francesca Bourgault; and a tech, stage management,
170 and costume crew of NEYT students.

171 The show runs Friday through Sunday, Dec. 12 to 14 and
172 19 to 21 at New England Youth Theatre, 100 Flat Street,

173 Brattleboro. Advance tickets are available at neyt.org/little-women.

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