Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* was the favorite book of many a child, especially young girls. The book tells the story of Jo March and her three sisters, Meg, Beth and Amy, as they grow up under the watchful eye of their beloved “Marmee,” as well as their father and other beloved family and friends.

*Little Women* lends itself well to staging, as made abundantly clear in Pierrot Productions’ *Little Women, the Musical*, which opened September 11 at the Kelsey Theatre at Mercer. Director Kat Ross Kline has assembled a stellar cast and provided them excellent guidance, and they are most successful at bringing *Little Women* to life.

Samantha Sharpe is remarkable as Jo March. Jo believes that to be a great writer, she must travel and live life to the fullest. But her heart is home with her mother and sisters, in particular, Beth. Sharpe’s vibrant performance and outstanding voice are perfectly suited to illustrating Jo’s conflicting emotions. Her Act I solo, “Astonishing,” lives up to its name in her rendition.

Sharpe is ably complemented by Marnie Kanarek, portraying the eldest March Sister, romantic, hopeful Meg; Heather Corson as sweet, shy, frail Beth, and Jessica Turk as spoiled, impetuous youngest sister, Amy. All four actresses bring the right amounts of sweetness and sharpness to their portrayals. As Marmee, Susan Blair shines as a mother who must cope with raising her girls alone; her husband is a military chaplain, away during the Civil War.

Gabrielle Affleck is spot-on in her portrayal of Aunt March, providing her great-nieces with important lessons in civility and social graces, and hitting just the right notes of acerbic wit and affection in so doing. The girls all seem to initially disdain or actively fear Aunt March – she is not one for warmth and affection – but Jo and Amy in particular come to admire her, and it’s clear the feeling is mutual. Aunt March doesn’t coddle, but she is not without love for her family. Other standout performances include Jeff Price’s Professor Bhaer – Price’s performance of “How I Am” is nothing short of stunning – and Zach Taylor’s awkward, fun-loving Laurie, who delights in finding a family in the four March sisters.

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Musical Director Peter de Mets did a masterful job with his cast and his musicians. The voices in Little Women shine, number after number, and his orchestra was a delightful accompaniment. Barbara Paolillo’s costumes are note-perfect, and Bill Mercado’s unique set design and M. Kitty Getlik’s lighting bring beauty and simplicity to the production. There were some issues with the sound on opening night; it was occasionally difficult to hear the performers over the orchestra, and Sharpe’s microphone was problematic during her solo numbers.

Little Women, the Musical runs through September 20.

LITTLE WOMEN, THE MUSICAL
Music by Jason Howland
Lyrics by Mindi Dickstein
Directed by Kat Ross Kline
Musical Direction by Peter de Mets
September 11-20, 2015
Pierrot Productions
The Kelsey Theatre at Mercer
Mercer County Community College
1200 Old Trenton Road
West Windsor, NY 08550
609-570-3333

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