

Theatre presents "Little Women," classic feminist tale

BY MADELINE MARTIN
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Ouachita's Department of Theatre Arts will present its spring musical "Little Women" from April 15-17 at 7:30 p.m. and April 18 at 2:30 p.m.

Based on Louisa May Alcott's semi-autobiographical novel, "Little Women" follows the lives of the four March sisters—Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy—as well as their beloved mother Marmee, who cares for them on her own while their father is fighting for the Union Army in the Civil War. The story spans four years and jumps back and forth in time. Set in Concord, Mass., and New York City, it mainly focuses on Jo and her aspirations of becoming a famous, successful writer.

When it came to selecting the musical, director and Assistant Professor of Theatre Arts Stephanie

Murry and music director Dr. Jon Secrest agreed on "Little Women" due to their love of the story. It also suits the department's talent pool since the majority of theatre students are women.

"We thought it would be a smart idea to highlight those women while still having enough opportunities for the males in the department as well," Murry said.

This production is unique because it is double cast. A double cast production features two casts that get an equal opportunity to perform the show. For "Little Women," one cast will perform on Thursday and Saturday while the other cast will perform on Friday and Sunday.

The decision to double cast the show came before COVID-19, but ended up working in the creative team's favor. The musical calls for a small cast, making social distancing onstage easier. In an

educational theatre setting, a double cast production provides a team-building atmosphere while giving more students a chance to showcase their talents.

"You have a collaborator to bounce ideas off of who is just as invested in the character development as you are," Murry said. "I think that it's a different experience to have a peer to have those conversations with."

Paige Price, a senior musical theatre major from Plano, Texas, and Payton Mixon, a sophomore musical theatre major from New Caney, Texas, share the role of Jo March, the second-eldest sister who is full of fire, passion and determination.

For Price, Jo's story is about the ups and downs that come with going from childhood into adulthood.

"I think of 'Little Women' as one of the first coming-of-age stories in

modern literature," Price said. "We see Jo grow up with her sisters, and we see them face the trials and tribulations of growing up."

Throughout the show, Jo fights against societal expectations of women in the late 1800s and paves her own way to achieving her dreams of being a successful writer.

"Jo is very fiery, passionate and defiant for her time," Mixon said. "I feel like she would be the head of the feminist movement if it happened that early."

Both Price and Mixon identify strongly with their character. Playing Jo provides them with a sense of self-confidence.

"I like how powerful I feel while playing Jo," Price said. "She has softer moments, too, but even those are powerful to be a part of because she just loves the people in her life so dearly and cares for them so deeply."

The role of Jo is very demanding. The entire show is a vocal and physical marathon, and she only leaves the stage for four scenes. However, Mixon feels that sharing qualities with Jo makes it easier to portray her.

"Jo and I are very similar," Mixon said. "It's not an easy role, but it feels very natural to play her because we have very similar personalities."

Overall, audiences can expect a heartwarming story about a group of sisters changing along with the world around them that features powerful music and strong, female-led performances.

Tickets for "Little Women" will be available through the JPAC box office or online at www.obu.edu/boxoffice on Monday, March 29. Livestream tickets will also go on sale on March 29. Students are eligible for one free ticket with the presentation of their student ID.