

# Family at heart of 'Women'

Molly Gilmore for The Olympian  
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Because she is playing Marmee, the wise and loving mother of four teenage girls in "Little Women," Jana Tyrrell has been thinking a lot about motherhood.

"Being a mother myself helps," said Tyrrell of Olympia, who stars in the musical version of Louisa May Alcott's novel, opening tonight at Capital Playhouse. "I know what it is to worry and love and fuss over your own children."

Fittingly, Tyrrell's greatest connection to the coming-of-age story about the four March sisters is through her own mother.

"It was my mother's favorite book," she said. "It brings a smile to my face when I think about how excited she would have been to see me play Marmee."



Family is at the heart of the story, agreed director Adam Michael Lewis of Macomb, Ill.

"It's about the strength of the family unit and how important it is in times of trouble to have a family to cling to," Lewis said, pointing out that most people have experienced a spoiled little sister like Amy or a bossy relation like Aunt March.

And among the four sisters, everyone can relate to one or another. "Amy is a little brat; Jo is the dreamer; Beth is the silent but wise one; and Meg is the older sister who longs for love.

"It's universal. It's family. It's fun."

Lewis comes to this role as a newcomer to Capital Playhouse, but not to "Little Women." He played Professor Bhaer in a 2006 production.

The musical makes some necessary cuts to Alcott's story, but the spirit is true to the much-loved book, he said.

“Some purists will say, ‘Well, that’s not how it happened in the book,’ ” he said. “I say, ‘Forget that — it’s a musical, and it’s a wonderful story.’”

“The music is so true to the spirit of the story and the feeling of it,” he added. “Sometimes when a book is translated into a musical, you have a pop-rock song thrown in and it doesn’t quite fit.

“This music helps to convey the period without losing the Broadway feel and the Broadway sound.”

It also conveys that holiday feeling, opening with the March family’s Christmas celebration — a celebration without Mr. March, who has gone to fight the Civil War. “They are very aware that they are not all together,” Tyrrell said.

“Part of the beauty of the story is that it’s so universal,” she added. “With the war crisis that we face here, with brothers and fathers and sons and uncles being in foreign lands, that is something that could definitely strike a chord with an audience member.”

The role of Marmee definitely strikes a chord with Tyrrell.

“I would hope to think that I’m a kind and caring provider and mother for my children as Marmee is for hers,” she said. “She has that sense of, ‘We’re going to get through today. We’ll do it because we’re a family. Together as a family, we’re invincible.’”

“It’s part of what makes the play charming.”