

# Opening early

## A post-turkey holiday theater extravaganza

By Christian Carvajal  
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The 2005 Broadway musical adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's classic, *Little Women*, is currently playing at Capitol Playhouse.

Some families enjoy a tradition of opening Christmas presents before Christmas morning. Apparently South Sound theater does, too; I've already seen two of Olympia's holiday season productions with two more on the way.



I'm happy to report Capital Playhouse finishes 2010 on a (figuratively) high note with the 2005 Broadway musical adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's classic, *Little Women*. Visiting Illinoisan director Adam Michael Lewis develops vocal and acting performances in equal measure, and Christie Murphy rises to that challenge with a star-quality performance as proto-feminist Jo March. Her clear voice fills Bruce Haasl's gorgeously voluminous set for the Act I closer, "Astonishing." Stephen Anastasia is charmingly awkward - and occasionally acrobatic - as Jo's admirer, Laurie, though it's pretty clear he's barking up the wrong March sister. See, Alcott claimed she fell "in love with so many pretty girls and never once the least bit with any man," but she dabbled in romance with one man, nicknamed "Laddie." In this fictionalized version, there are ... complications.

Bailey Boyd and Carolyn Willems van Dijk, aka Cinderella and the Baker's Wife respectively from Capital's *Into the Woods*, are equally effective as vain Amy and romantic Meg. Alisa Tobin emerges as Beth in Act II, when a single pulled string provides tear jerking spectacle, and Jana Tyrell's voice is powerfully expressive on "Here Alone." Yes, per Chapter 34 of the novel, Jo really does sell a story to the *Weekly Volcano*. I know the *Volcano*'s per-word rate, kid. Don't spend it all in one place.

I've been hard on the folks at Capital Playhouse this year, and they've noticed. But I'm obliged to hold them to professional standards, because CP is capable of shows as thoroughly enjoyable as this one. I wish a late switch from *White Christmas* (now at

Tacoma Musical Playhouse) didn't put Capital in direct competition with Olympia Family Theater's non-musical version of *Little Women*, opening December 10; but hopefully there'll be room in town for both.

Harlequin, meanwhile, was slower to engage me with its revival of a 2005 original, *A Stardust Christmas Carol*. If you've seen a *Stardust* show before, you know what to expect: a jukebox musical strung around 1940s crooner classics. Think *Forever Plaid* minus a decade of musical evolution, or a live version of *The Lawrence Welk Holiday Special*. I'm a fan of several members of the cast, director Linda Whitney, and Harlequin's jazz combo, but not so much of *Stardust*'s unthreatening musical vernacular. But even I dug "Little Jack Frost Get Lost," "Everybody Eats When They Come to My House," "Boogie Woogie Santa Claus" and a lovely arrangement (by Syd Potter) of "Angels We Have Heard on High," featuring high harmony by Alison Monda.

The show alternates between solid song-and-dance numbers and a radio drama retelling of Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol*, but the shifts are not always done smoothly or with sufficient thematic justification. The second act is livelier than the first, and musical director Bruce Whitney is fun to watch as a Stanislavskian Scrooge. All eight members of the primary cast are talented singers. Erica Penn is a natural fit for this material, as are Matthew Posner and Rian Wilson. Of the band, saxophonist Dan Blunck is a standout. The jokes are weak, especially a puppy impression that smacks of wasted time, but all in all, *Stardust Christmas Carol* is cute and family-friendly and generous with its assembly of musical talent.

On the gossip front, congratulations to Matt Posner and Alison Monda, who were married Nov. 7.

Both productions are on staggered performance schedules to work around holidays, so call ahead or visit company websites at [capitalplayhouse.com](http://capitalplayhouse.com) and [harlequinproductions.org](http://harlequinproductions.org). Coming next week: Reviews of OLT's decidedly different *Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol*, plus what I'm hoping will be a sanguine affair from TAO, the Lizzie Borden story *Blood Relations*.