

British Theatre Guide

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Little Women

Adapted from the Louisa May Alcott novel by Anne-Marie Casey

Pitlochry Festival Theatre, Belgrade Coventry and Blackpool Grand Theatre

The Lyric, Theatre Royal Plymouth

17–21 June 2025

Louisa May Alcott's iconic coming-of-age story of the March sisters, set against the backdrop of the American Civil War, is given a gentle, somewhat pedestrian, treatment in Anne-Marie Casey's adaptation.

Based, in part, on Alcott's own family and upbringing, Casey's cuts create a *Reader's Digest*-esque abridged version with the girls' journeys unimpeded by any subplot or burdened by anyone unessential to the pared-back story.

Budding writer defiant Jo is firmly centre stage, and Grace Molony (feted for *The Enfield Haunting* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*) keeps the attention, evokes the smiles but somehow fails to engage the heart—possibly due to director Loveday Ingram's pacing and the inevitable episodic nature of the story—as she refuses to conform to the 19-century patriarchal norm. Her relationships—with her sisters and others, most notably best buddy Laurie (*Whitetail* and *Small Town, Big Story's* Cillian Lenaghan)—are palpable, easy and convincing.

Lenaghan's Laurie is foppish and fun, and he portrays the decline into Hooray Henryness, drink and drifting well.

The girls' father has squandered his fortune (clearly since his spinster sister is loaded) and has volunteered as chaplain to the abolitionist troops leaving his sweet, charitable wife (a very able Ellie Pawsey covering) to tend to his flock—both their daughters and needy parishioners. Marmee is nurturing and kind—giving away the very food on their table—and their girls must take work where they can to replace it and wear scorched poplin to the ball while she administers to the sick and their father is injured up North.

Thank goodness that the determined and ambitious Jo is willing to turn her pen to lurid, questionable but lucrative fiction to support the family.

Jade Kennedy (*Rebus: A Game Called Malice*) is the goodly, beautiful Meg, uncomplaining governess to spoiled brats, awaiting her turn for inevitable marriage and children and willing to wear dancing slippers a size too small to achieve it, while Catherine Chalk (*Hilma*) is docile, doll-hugging Beth whose eventual—unemotional—demise is rather lost in a fast second half and Jack Ashton is the other love interests—John Brooke and Professor Bhaer.

Stage Debut Award-nominee, *Grantchester's* Imogen Elliott, is nicely peevish as a young, spiteful Amy and believable as a gushing debutante with an eye on the main chance and full intention to marry money—and does so thanks to the strident Aunt March (*2Point4 Children's* Belinda Lang, who competently wrings every ounce of humour from the gift of a part) and a European tour.

Rauri Murchison's set brings the outside in with tree trunks invading the domesticity of dining table, piano and ubiquitous chaise longue in the family home, while bookcases establish the city boarding house and red velvet curtain denotes lavish ballrooms.

There is song—with superb harmonies—scattered throughout, which brings relief from the rather slow trundle through the first half and gallop to the final post after the interval, which gives Jo's relationship with the professor little time to breathe and develop.

Problematic but pleasant.

Reviewer: [Karen Bussell](#)