LITTLE WOMEN, BIG SKIRTS: CREATING THE COSTUMES FOR
LITTLE WOMEN THE MUSICAL

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by
Lauren D. Hailey

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To my Mom who has always been there to support me.
Les grandes personnes ne comprennent jamais rien toutes seules, et c’est fatigant, pour les enfants, de toujours et toujours leur donner des explications.

-Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT

Little Women, Big Skirts: Creating the Costumes for Little Women the Musical
by
Lauren D. Hailey
Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts with a Concentration in Design and Technical Theatre
San Diego State University, 2012

This project is an account of the process of designing the costumes for San Diego State University’s Spring 2011 production of Little Women the Musical. It follows the design process from the initial reading of the script through the fitting and building process to the completion of the costumes and opening of the show. It will discuss the importance of the costume design to set time and place for this production due to the stylized nature of the set. This project covers the challenges of bringing a production to the stage and the collaborative process with the directors, performers, and other members of the design and production team.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1992) is a classic of American literature and as such is deeply embedded in our culture. Many people have experienced *Little Women* through reading and/or viewing one of the many film adaptations, and it has earned its place as a well-known and beloved story. It was therefore an exciting challenge to reinterpret the story in a fresh way as a member of the design team that brought the musical adaptation of *Little Women* to the stage at San Diego State University.

Louisa May Alcott was born on November 29, 1832 in Massachusetts. She never married and lived most of her life with her family in their home in Concord, MA. The story of *Little Women* is loosely based on her life and family. The novel was originally written and published as two separate volumes. The first volume, *Little Women*, was published in 1868. Alcott only wrote the novel at the urging of a publisher friend of her father’s. He suggested that she write a novel for girls after he published one of her short stories. While writing a story for girls was a challenge for her, the published work, *Little Women*, was widely loved by young women throughout the U.S. The second volume, *Good Wives*, was published a year later in 1869. Both parts were later combined into a single book in 1880.

Louisa May Alcott's autobiographical story of growing up during and after the Civil War in a house dominated by women was ripe for a musical makeover, its themes of sisterhood and female empowerment providing an automatic connect for women of all ages. Feisty aspiring writer Jo March -- who maintains fierce loyalty and love for her family while refusing the constricting role laid out for women at that time -- seems a tailor-made figure to captain a musical, inviting anthemic power ballads about making one's mark in life. (Rooney)

*Little Women* is about the fictional March family. Josephine March (Jo), and her 3 sisters, Meg, Beth and Amy live in Concord, Massachusetts with their mother Marmee in the mid 1860’s. The story takes place during the American Civil War while the girls’ father was away in service as a pastor in the Union Army. The March sisters depend on each other and their mother to make it through the trials of growing up, made harder without their father. The story is told from the perspective of Jo March, the second-oldest daughter and the central
character, who is a strong, passionate, and independent girl with a huge imagination and strong bond with her family, especially her sisters. Jo puts her imagination to use as a budding writer. Jo’s character is based on Louisa May Alcott.

Meg is the oldest daughter and is very much like Marmee. Beth tends to be sickly and is the peace-maker of the family. Amy is the youngest and does not get along well with Jo. The story focuses on what it is like for Jo and her sisters growing up in unusual circumstances, and how they deal with overcoming difficulties, some of which are caused by their own character flaws.

Theodore Lawrence and his grandson Theodore “Laurie” Lawrence III are neighbors of the March family. Their lives are intertwined throughout the book and the play. Mr. Lawrence, who owns a beautiful piano that has not been played since the death of his daughter, discovers that Beth loves to play the piano and makes it available to her. The restoration of music to his life becomes a joy for him. John Brooke is Laurie’s tutor and later Mr. Lawrence’s clerk.

Jo moves to New York and stays in a boarding house run by Mrs. Kirk where she meets Professor Bhaer, who is also a boarder in Mrs. Kirk’s house; he is a German university professor who shares a love of literature and philosophy with Jo. He becomes interested in Jo’s writing and is happy to critique her work. Their mutual love of books and writing becomes the basis for a warm friendship.

In addition to the actual characters, there is also a colorful, imaginary cast of characters who appear in Jo’s “Operatic Tragedy” stories. They include Rodrigo and Rodrigo II, Clarissa, Braxton, the troll, the hag and the knight.

The musical version of *Little Women* begins in the boarding house in New York in 1865 where Jo recounts to Professor Bhaer the most recent publisher’s rejection of one of her stories. Jo has created in her mind a vibrant operatic tragedy, which comes to life before our eyes as she tells her tale to Professor Bhaer. This operatic tragedy is a fantastic melodrama featuring a damsel in distress, villains, and heroes. After Professor Bhaer decries her stories as frivolous, Jo begins to question herself. She reminisces and thinks back on her childhood, her family and how her sisters used to enjoy her stories, as seen in Figure 1 with the 4 girls in their tableau at the end of “Our Finest Dreams”.
The scene changes to the March house in Concord, two years earlier. Jo and her sisters are together in the living room putting on “the operatic tragedy”.

The rest of Act one continues from this point showing the salient events in Jo’s life in Concord. The girls depend on the strength of their mother “Marmee” as they struggle through wartime, poverty and the absence of their father.

The audience follows Jo through the trials of growing up, sisterhood, fights, first love and rejection and for Jo the heartbreak of change and moving forward in life. Jo wanted the sisters to stay together just the way they were; best of friends, sisters and young forever. Everything is changing and she can’t control it. Paradoxically, Jo always wanted to be a
writer and travel. When Laurie proposes to Jo and is refused, he tries to persuade Jo that she needs to grow up and accept the changes that are happening. Meg has gotten engaged and Amy is growing up; she and Jo fought a lot and so Amy was sent to live with Aunt March.

Jo’s characteristic fervor is shown at the end of Act 1 where she proclaims her independence and that she will be “astonishing”; that she will be or do something great in this world. “I may be small but I’ve got giant plans to shine as brightly as the sun. I will blaze until I find my time and place, I will be fearless, surrendering modesty and grace. I will not disappear without a trace. I’ll shout and start a riot, be anything but quiet. Christopher Columbus, I’ll be astonishing, astonishing, astonishing at last” (Knee and Dickstein 66). As everything in her life changes, she decides to run away to NY to make her mark.

As Act 2 opens, we are back in the boarding house in New York, and from this point the story unfolds in chronological order. Jo has just learned that The Weekly Volcano Press has agreed to publish her latest short story. With Professor Bhaer and Mrs. Kirk for an audience, Jo launches into her tale, in operatic tragedy style, of how she convinced the publisher to accept her story. As she concludes her story, Mrs. Kirk gives Jo a telegram from home. In the telegram, Jo learns that her sister Beth is ill with Scarlet Fever.

Despite her recent success in New York, Jo feels she must return to Concord to be with her family. Jo felt responsible for Beth’s illness because she believed her absence caused it or made it worse. Jo decided to fund a trip to Cape Cod with her “wee literary earnings” for herself, Beth and Marmee, hoping that the fresh air will restore Beth to health. Beth, however, does not recover from the Scarlet Fever, and subsequently dies.

During this time, Jo maintains a correspondence with Professor Bhaer, of whom she had grown fond. The Professor receives a letter from Jo asking how he is. As he reads it aloud, it turns into a love song as he experiences an epiphany – he loves Jo!

At the end of Act 2, Amy returns to Concord from her trip to Europe with Aunt March and announces to Jo that she and Laurie are engaged to be married. On the day of the wedding, Professor Bhaer knocks at the door of the March home. Jo had sent him a copy of her new novel to read, and he had been so enthusiastic about it that he gave it to the publisher. The publisher had accepted it. The Professor comes in person to tell Jo the good news that her new novel, Little Women, will be published. He had decided that it would take
him less time to travel than it would take a letter. As they talk, Professor Bhaer and Jo agree to marry.

The book\textsuperscript{1} of Little Women (the musical) was written by Allan Knee; Mindy Dickstein wrote the lyrics, and the music was composed by Jason Howland. The musical opened on Broadway in January 2005, and only ran for 5 months with 137 performances. The original production cast 10 actors in the lead roles, who doubled for the supplemental characters (see operatic tragedy in Chapter 6).

In adapting a musical from a novel, the visual and aural elements take the place of the words. In a novel like Little Women, which is largely a memoir or reminiscence, the challenge is to encapsulate the story and characters in a streamlined, shortened version, without the benefit of exposition. It becomes the job of the design team to represent on stage the time, place, environment, and mood, as well as develop the characters beyond the lines of the script. This artistry fills in between the lines, as it were.

Throughout the process, I was aware that the audience would very likely come to this production with preconceptions based on prior experience with Little Women in other forms, and I wanted my vision to be strong and unique. As my thesis design, creating the costumes for Little Women was a wonderful challenge for me, and a very good fit for my skills and experience. I had previously designed or assisted in designing costumes for five musicals during my graduate studies at SDSU\textsuperscript{2}. One of those musicals (Tom and Huck and Jim) took place in the United States during the 1860’s, like Little Women but was a completely different area and class of people and a more simplified and stylized show. This was a great opportunity to delve into a different side of the clothing of the crinoline era.

\textsuperscript{1} Book – the dialogue of a musical.

\textsuperscript{2}San Diego State University will be referred to SDSU from here on.
CHAPTER 2

THE GANG’S ALL HERE: THE DESIGN PROCESS AND COLLABORATION OF LITTLE WOMEN

The beginning of a design process always involves reading and studying the script. I was familiar with the story of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott from my childhood. When I was in elementary school, we read *Little Women*. I remember that we took a quiz on the library computer answering multiple-choice questions. I also watched the movie starring Katherine Hepburn as Josephine March (“Jo”), the book’s main character many times. I refrained from relying on any memory of the character appearances from the movie, as the play would need to be a fresh depiction of the characters based on the collaborative design process, which would be developed.

After reading and studying the script, I began the process of researching the clothing of the period and the life of the author, Louisa May Alcott, to understand what design elements were needed to depict the period. One thing that struck me was how similar the author’s circumstances were to the family she created in *Little Women*. The March family had been fairly wealthy and was generous with their wealth, but this generosity lead to its loss. Due to the war, times were difficult for everyone, including the March family. With father March off at war, the family could not maintain its status. But as a family, they got by with what they had, which was enough due to the strong bond between them. This was significant to me as a designer: I needed to design character pieces in a period appropriate style, from the standpoint of a family without means for rich fabrics, trim and jewelry, or of the most current fashion. They had to make do with hand-me-downs and mended garments.

This being a musical, I knew that the music, melodies and lyrics would have an effect on the mood of the show. To get a feel for the show overall, I listened to the original Broadway cast recording, as I read through the script. This gave me a sense of how the music integrated into the story. I discovered that the musical element was both lighthearted
and bold. The music lightened the mood of the script with its fiery passion and contemporary musical styling.

In addition to studying the script and musical materials, and researching the clothing of the period, I also looked for inspirational imagery to depict family, sisterhood and reminiscence (memory). This inspirational imagery was a tool to evoke feelings, moods and impressions for the show. Imagery research helped to reflect on and establish the strong bond in the March family. This type of imagery provided a tool to discuss the characters with my directors and fellow designers to ensure that my design would be consistent with the overall intent of the design team. Figure 2 shows some of my inspirational research.

Figure 2. Inspirational research images.
The costume designer is one of a team who bring a play to life through a cohesive design. The creative team generally consists of a director, lighting designer, scenic designer and costume designer. The production of Little Women actually had two directors, Paula Kalustian and Brandon Maier who worked together to provide direction for this musical. Because Brandon was a new director and a recent graduate from the musical theatre MFA program, and he had proposed producing the show, the department thought it would be a good experience for him to direct Little Women, the Musical.

The design team for Little Women consisted of five members, Virginia Provencher, 3rd year scenic design graduate student, Luke Olson 2nd year lighting design graduate student, our two directors – Paula, the Head of the MFA Musical Theatre, and Brandon, a recent graduate of the Musical Theatre MFA program, and myself, the costume designer.

The job of the scenic designer is to create the physical world that the characters interact with. The designer sets the scene through furniture and set dressing, plus any pieces that may symbolize/represent buildings, outdoor scenery or other elements that depict the venue.

The primary job of the lighting designer is to light the stage and the actors. Lighting can help set the mood and possibly show passage of time or time of day, and can help reinforce location through light quality through the use of color, intensity, direction of light, transitions, and texture.

The role of the costume designer is first and foremost to dress the actors in such a way that helps establish the characters. The costuming can be a driving force in defining the time period and economic status of the characters. In addition it can also help to depict passage of time and circumstance.

Members of the design team included Denitsa Bliznakova, my design advisor who helped with research suggestions, decision-making, fabric choices, colors, and story design revisions; Teri Tavares, costume shop manager and lead draper who draped the dresses for Jo, Amy and Meg, and gave lots of advice on fabric options and dying. Peter Herman draped Beth and the men. He either did or set up all the alterations and provided guidance on hair, wigs and hair accessories. Angie Zanolini was the assistant costume designer who helped me with research and paperwork and pulled costumes, jewelry and accessories from stock. She helped with dress rehearsal where she took notes and acted as my “gofer,” tweaking
costumes, finding missing pieces, or getting new ones. This allowed me to stay in the theatre and point out what was needed. She helped with the strike. Tahmineh Moyer, an undergrad student, was the wardrobe supervisor, organizing, keeping track of and completing the extensive paperwork that included the dressing lists and piece sheets for the crew. She was also the main stitcher who trued the fabric, stitched it and did the finishing work for young Amy’s dress after Teri had draped it. Jonathan Southwell helped with restocking.

I had worked with everyone on this team before and looked forward to creating the world of Little Women with them. I knew that there would be a lot of great creative ideas and a collaborative approach to the design. The first meetings of the design team are about exchanging ideas about the show and making sure that we are all designing based on a shared understanding and vision of the script. It is important to go into these meetings with an open mindset. Being part of the collaborative process and determining together the direction to take is part of what makes designing a show both challenging and rewarding.

During the initial meetings, we shared various inspirational imagery, which would assist us in evoking the visceral, symbolic, and/or literal elements of the characters, time period and setting of the scenes. This imagery provided a tool for creating a cohesive design that could be illustrated and implemented in creating the various aspects of the musical (lighting effects, costumes and scenic). We discussed our first impressions of the play and the specific directions and overall visions that our directors shared with us.

Establishing a time period and the costumes’ authenticity is essential to the initial phase of the costume design process. Determining the period silhouette was especially important because of the large variants in the circumference of the skirts of the dresses over the decade and a half from 1850 to 1865. Determining the skirt circumference would determine how the costumes would affect other aspects of the production. If the girls wore large hoop skirts instead of smaller petticoats, the scenic design would need to accommodate the circumference of the skirt, entryways would need to be larger, furniture more spread out, adequate wing and crossover space would need to be provided, etc. The directors and actors would need to be aware of the limitations set by wearing corsets and hoop skirts which might affect the actors’ movements, breath, and personal space required for their roles.

It was during the initial design meetings that we needed to decide how authentic to period we wanted to make the costumes, and what was going to be the best way to establish
the period. Historical accuracy may not always be the best choice, but being knowledgeable about period accuracy is important so that deviation from it is a deliberate and conscious decision.

In contrast, the silhouette for the menswear, being more similar to current fashion in terms of the clothing items worn, did not affect the men’s ability to move about the stage or require additional space. The menswear did not have the extreme bulk or body shaping that the women’s clothing did.

In subsequent design team meetings we shared our ideas, research and discussed known or anticipated challenges and issues. We felt that the musical should emphasize the reminiscent aspect of *Little Women* because the story is based on Jo’s memories. Jo takes part in all of the proceedings but she is also an observer of the events and at times speaks to the audience about her life through reminiscences and song.

The inspiration for Virginia’s set design was a civil war era postcard she had found during her research (see Figure 3). The scrolled paper and border of blue flowers inspired Virginia’s design for the proscenium and upstage portal. The proscenium was designed as a scrolled page and the words of Louisa May Alcott were written on the (proscenium) page. This design reflected Jo’s essence as a writer and the symbolism of Jo’s operatic tragedy presenting as though it came off the page. To provide Jo with a place to be present on the stage, but not necessarily interact during every scene, Virginia designed a permanent writing desk downstage where Jo could sit and write, and observe the activities from her life, then step back onto the stage to participate once again.

As the scenic designer, Virginia wanted to present a stylized world. The set for the house did not have actual walls or a real living room sitting on the stage. Pieces were moved around the stage to create the sense of scene without needing to define every detail of the space to literally represent the setting. For the attic, instead of having an actual roof and wall, the set was designed with floating window and three pointed arches representing the roof, plus some set dressing. Moveable lath and trees remained visible, to be more or less

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3 Proscenium or proscenium arch is the picture frame around the stage inside which all the action of the play takes place.

4 Portal – a frame around the stage at any point upstage of the proscenium.
prominent (by their position on stage) to differentiate being outdoors from being inside a building.

From the research that I brought, this image (Figure 4) struck the directors and me strongly as representative of the feel and color for the characters. It gave us the idea that each girl should have her own color identifier. Having such a color identifier would differentiate the girls and speak to their characters as we saw them; their silhouette would reinforce this idea.

The lighting designer’s process differs from that of either a scenic designer or costume designer. The lighting research and coordination is vital to depict the desired mood, time and/or weather reference and other artistic impressions consistent with the performance. The lighting design is not constricted by the need to be period accurate; it should simply serve the needs of the production as best it can.

Luke presented beautiful landscape imagery and color concepts during this meeting. He showed us how he hoped to have different feels for the lighting. One would be a warm amber glow to represent the light sources of the interior—the warm light of candles and fire. Another one would be for the clear natural light of the outdoors in daytime. He suggested a completely different look for the operatic tragedy, a fantastic forest with lots of jewel tones and no naturalistic lighting.
You always have to keep in mind that there are script dictated restrictions and goals that can create problems, and they vary from show to show depending on the script and the resources available to you. Budget is always something to keep in mind, but cannot be the primary concern. Clever and skilled design can come out of small budgets, and shows can still be successful. It’s about being able to be creative within the limitations, having a skillful shop and being able to think outside the box, among other things.

The following four paragraphs highlight some of the restrictions I had in working on this show.

The inability to build all of the costumes; some things would have to be rented or purchased. There was a very limited number of men and women’s costumes in this specific period in the SDSU costume stock. Rental options were limited and/or expensive (locally and in Los Angeles).

Corsets and hoop skirts: Corsets were necessary to create the women’s period silhouette. The corset is not an undergarment that is commonly worn anymore, women are not accustomed to being cinched in at the waist in this manner. Therefore, the actresses would need to rehearse in the corsets on a regular basis so they would get comfortable (accustomed) to them, and break them in. Similarly hoop skirts and petticoats do not exist in
present fashions. Women are not used to the bulk and large circumference around their feet. It was important that they practice wearing hoops and petticoats so that they would learn the appropriate ways of going through openings, sitting without flipping the dress up, and going up and down stairs. It was crucial that the movement felt and looked natural, and that the skirts did not pose a safety risk.

The operatic tragedy: The design for the characters in the operatic tragedy could not commence until we had decided how the tragedy would be cast; completely as an ensemble or double casting from the main characters. The tragedy scenes were a creation of Jo’s imagination that would come to life. They were not based on reality, neither hers nor ours.

Designing for the Don Powell Stage: The Don Powell Stage is a large proscenium, which I had not worked on before. As a designer, you must remember to consider the size of the stage in your process because it can affect your final decisions. If the costumes were small they could be dwarfed by the set or be swallowed up by open space. Small patterns could be undiscernible or appear significantly different than intended. Certain embellishments, details, and accessories may not be seen at all due to the distance between the audience and the stage.

These were things that I had to keep in mind and challenged me in the design and execution process.

Following the basic research phase, the next part of the process was to do a French scene breakdown to establish entrances and exits based on the script and identifying any script-dictated changes. In the French scene chart I also made sure to notate the progression of time, as the story is not told in a linear way. This gave me a tool for discussion with the directors.

It was necessary to do detailed paperwork in order to figure out the flow of the storyline. Due to the stylized nature of the set, the costumes became the primary means to establish the time period and season. It was also necessary to keep the costumes simple and consistent so there was no confusion as to which character was which.

Everyone on the design team had worked with everyone else on one project or another. Having prior experience working with each other meant that we were familiar with each other’s processes, and knew we could openly discuss issues or bring ideas to the table.
This was an advantage because we knew we could develop a strong team dynamic and could rely on each other.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCHING HISTORY AND FINDING THE
CHARACTERS

The musical *Little Women* gave me the opportunity to delve into the clothing of the mid 1800’s and to research a specific event – the American civil war. Crinoline, antebellum, civil war, hoop skirt fashions were all common names for the fashion era in America in the mid 1800’s, specifically the 1850’s and 1860’s. The Crinoline era is in the middle of the Victorian age, following the Romantic period and preceding the bustle. As with most periods it was the women’s garments that distinguish this period. The Crinoline era is defined by the large bell-shaped skirt with a narrow corseted waist. This was achieved with a tightly cinched corset and or boned bodice and a hoop or crinoline and/or petticoats under the skirt to create the bell shaped understructure.

Menswear from that time period was not so different from today’s. As it is today there are several distinguishing features that cross over from the previous and into the next period. Generally men wore high-waisted pants that tapered near the ankle, and a vest or waistcoat, and when in public or for special occasions they always wore a frockcoat or sack jacket. There were more well-established social rules and restrictions on how people dressed during this period than there are today.

During the Crinoline period clothing was indicative of Socio-economic status. The size of the hoop and the expensiveness of the fabric were indicative of wealth. People with more wealth were able to afford more materials for hoops and petticoats and better fabrics for their dresses. Generally women wore corsets; depending on social class one could have an older or passed-down corset. During the 1850’s the invention of the sewing machine made the manufacturing of corsets easier and faster.

Creating the design for this period, which was full of exaggerated pieces for the women, was appealing to me. This musical gave me a chance to completely create the world of *Little Women* through the costumes. I was able to sculpt these girls, these “little women”,


into characters based on the information from the script and the research I did. My goal was to design costumes for each character by maintaining individual styles and personalities. To do this I needed to assign a unique characteristic for each girl. This would also help the audience to recognize each of the girls and learn a bit about her personality when she first appears on stage.

As the designer, my role is to service the play as best I can with what is available and what I can get, make, or do. Some of this is merely in the design, in research and interpretation; some of it relies on what resources and budget I have to work with.

In initial conversation with Paula and Brandon I brought my inspirational research and some of my period research to discuss. Through this we found a basic color scheme for the costumes. My inspirational image led us to identify Jo with the color blue – which was also the color of the flowers from Virginia’s inspiration. This also presented the idea of pink for Amy and teal for Marmee. The colors for Meg and Beth came later through further research and inspirational images.

Finding research images in color to support design choices was challenging. Fashion plates were colored but subject to artistic license. Photography of the time was black and white, so while helpful to see actual garments with detail and silhouette, photos did not provide any color information for my research. Additionally, most photographs of the period were posed portraits or taken at special events and people were dressed in their best clothing. Those who could afford photography were mostly upper class, which made finding pictures of the middle and lower classes in everyday garments more difficult. Since the Marches were not upper class, the photographic research largely did not depict what they would have worn.

From my French scene breakdown, character analysis and initial conversations with Paula and Brandon, I began to do specific character research and preliminary sketches. I organized my research by creating various PowerPoint presentations. This was an effective way to keep things organized and made it easy to share my concepts and progress with the design team. I created pages with general period research for men and women and then began to choose specific images for each character that I thought represented how I viewed their personality. If possible, I selected actual garments that I thought would be ideal for
them. I began by finding distinct silhouettes, hairstyles, accessories, and began to search for the colors.

Next I began the process of swatching. While looking for fabrics that would work for the show, I found that I was inspired by what I found that either confirmed my design or influenced changes. It was also an opportunity to purchase some of the fabrics needed to build some of the costumes. I went to the fabric district in Los Angeles and some of the local fabric stores in the San Diego area. I find swatching to be a fun part of the design process. It allows you to look at textures, patterns and colors. It also gave me the opportunity to look at the potential of a fabric and in several cases for this show do dye tests to make sure that the fabric’s color could be altered. I knew that I would not be able to find fabrics in all the colors we were planning for the March girls. I found various fabrics and presented them to the design team for discussion. We were able to eliminate some of the choices based on color, print and texture. I was soon able to get the final approval of the directors and the costume shop, which allowed me to purchase them.

A fabric not only has to have the right color, texture and pattern for the visual aesthetic of the design but also has to have the right qualities: hand, drapability, durability, etc. for the drapers and dyer to be able to properly execute the design as envisioned. Teri and I discussed what kind of yardage would be needed for each garment based on the girls’ measurements and the requirements of the garments based on period patterns. Since we already knew how much yardage we would be needing I was able to assess if there was enough fabric in the bolt to allow me to purchase it. This meant that I did not have to wait to get information from the shop and then return to purchase the fabric, so I did not need to risk having it be gone when I returned.

Next it was important to go character by character and define them for the directors and myself so that I could assign my research images to each character. My intention was to distinguish Jo by keeping her from being too girly as she is a tomboy who longs to be different from other girls. She longed for adventure, to see the world and to be a writer. She is frustrated; because she is not a boy she could not earn a living to support her family or go

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5 Swatching – going to fabric stores and obtaining samples of fabric to use as a reference for fabric purchasing and impressions/ideas about what a garment could be made of.
to war as her father did. I wanted to keep her look simple and un-frilly. My first challenge was to find the right blue for Jo. I swatched many different fabrics and came out with two options, a dark blue wool plaid with a yellow stripe and a light blue cotton plaid, with just a touch of seersucker. Paula and Brandon both loved the light blue cotton. In my research I chose imagery of some of the looks the script called for that I felt represented Jo’s tomboyish aspect, see Figure 5.


Meg, the oldest, is a romantic who, while not as vain as Amy, is extremely concerned with outward appearance and her standing in society. Meg is a caretaker and the girl who is the most like her mother. I wanted Meg to be the most feminine of the girls. I found a slightly older silhouette from the mid 1850’s, with the idea that she would wear one of her
mother’s old dresses. To highlight her femininity, the skirt she wore had the largest circumference and fullness. I also found that the gathered tiers added a lot to the femininity. Meg changes in appearance in Act 2 because she is now pregnant. It was interesting to research what women wore in that period during pregnancy, and images were difficult to locate as pregnancy was typically “hidden” during that time, see Figure 6 for Meg’s character and costume research.

Amy, the youngest of the March girls, is the most vain. I wished to emphasize her youth and use that to separate her from her sisters. There is a considerable difference in the clothing of a young girl and that of an adult woman during this time. Many young girls wore shorter dresses that ended between mid-calf and ankle, many were off-the-shoulder and often the petticoat would poke out from underneath the skirt. Most of the off-the-shoulder styles and puffy skirts seemed a bit too rich for the March family. To the contemporary eye she may have looked like she was being too adult for her age when compared to the rest of the women in the show, even if these silhouettes/or cuts were period appropriate. Inspired by one of my research images, I designed young Amy’s dress to be a hybrid of Meg and Jo’s looks; the light pink color was reminiscent of Meg’s color and the yoked dress with gathering coming from it and the belt at the waist felt like Jo’s dress, see Figure 7.

When Amy returns home from Europe in Act 2 she is all grown up, as pictured in Figure 8. Aunt March’s upper class status and her time in Europe had groomed Amy into a sophisticated lady. Amy first appears in Act 2 in an elegant traveling suit. Later we see her in a wedding gown from the romantic period (1840’s-1850’s) that could perhaps have been her mother’s or Aunt March’s.

Beth, the second youngest March sister, has a generous heart and keeps the peace in her family. She is the heart and the light of Jo’s life. For her garment I wanted it to appear as though she may have made a simpler version of a period dress from old garments or drapes. It maintained period elements but also kept her silhouette extremely simple and differentiated her from the other girls, with significantly less fullness in the skirt and less lines or embellishments on the bodice. My ideas for silhouette, hair, character and accessories are all shown in Figure 9.

In designing Aunt March she was depicted as middle-aged, which was roughly the age of Marmee, who was Aunt March’s sister-in-law. Since she was a woman in mourning during a time when there were specific rules, Aunt March needed to be wearing black. There were very specific mourning practices that were proscribed by society. Women were to wear black dresses that had simple lines with no frills and were not supposed to show skin (which was the purpose of gloves and veils). Figure 10 has examples of preliminary ideas for silhouette and accessories for Aunt March.
Figure 8. Amy, played by Michelle Tymich in her traveling dress. Photo by author.
Because she came and went at different times of the year over the course of several years, next came the question of how she may or may not change her dress. I found several embellishment pieces and outwear layers that I thought would be appropriate to do simple modifications to her look, such as a black or red cloak for traveling and winter; I used variations on fichus and jabots that could be added and removed from her garments to show passage of time.

In approaching the men’s costumes I tried to remain period accurate. When looking at research for Laurie, I knew that similarly to Amy he had to grow and change. At the beginning of the play he is essentially a boy and through his experiences with the family and in his own life he grows into a man. I looked at children’s clothing of the period for boys and young men, and found the basic characteristics of clothing that distinguished youth from adults. Young boys tended to wear short pants instead of long pants and jackets tended to be shorter with less shaping. This was the main distinction for me. Laurie was in his teens, almost an adult. I looked at the idea of shirtsleeves for him. Because of his youth, this was more acceptable. I also focused on the difference between a young man or child’s jacket and an adult man’s jacket. A lot of my research showed fairly large and bold patterns and plaids, with combining of different patterns, which I found very interesting.

For Mr. Lawrence, who was older, I felt that it was important to find images of someone who looked wealthy, proud, and distinguished. One of my favorite images for Mr. Lawrence showed an elderly gentleman wearing three garments, each with a different distinct and bold pattern. Figure 11 shows the research I used to create Mr. Lawrence.

John Brooke was a tutor and later clerk for Mr. Lawrence. He did not come from money and did not have a particularly lucrative career. Brooke was not about climbing the social ladder; he was satisfied with what he had. John Brooke aspired to gain Meg’s hand in marriage, and to be a good provider for his family. Brooke needed to have three looks. The first time we see Brooke is in the ball scene and the second time we see him he is in a Union Army uniform. In Act 2, when the war has ended, Brooke is now married to Meg, wearing everyday clothing. My research for Brooke, besides the fairly standard looks of formal wear and the army uniform, focused on finding a look for an average man from the period. I wanted to keep John Brooke simpler and less posh than the Lawrences. Because he was not
wealthy, his clothing would be much simpler, possibly mismatched and slightly rumpled solid pieces. Figure 12 shows examples of the feel and looks I wanted for Brooke.

Professor Bhaer had been a university professor in Germany but immigrated to the US where he earned a living as a tutor to Mrs. Kirk’s children and teaching language to boarders in her boarding house. Because Professor Bhaer had such a different background than the rest of the men, I researched several different types of looks. As seen in Figure 13 one image I found showed a stereotypical “buttoned up” professorial look. I also found a kind of ethnic look with an interesting sash around the waist and a decorated jacket instead of a traditional period silhouette. There was also an image of a man wearing monochromatic, rough fabric, which appeared slouchy and unfitted. The image that spoke to me most was a brown three-piece suit. It was period appropriate, and did not resemble any of the other men’s looks. I also researched outerwear options for him, for his trip to Concord. All of the research images that I chose for Professor Bhaer especially evoked the character for me.
CHAPTER 4

PRELIMINARY DESIGN (LIMITATIONS AND POST-RESEARCH PHASE)

I started my design process by looking at Jo and her journey through the play. I approached the original design in a very literal fashion. In my preliminary design sketches I had a different look for every scene based on my French scene breakdown. These were influenced by weather, season, passage of time, and special events such as a wedding or a ball. Using my initial preliminary design sketches I was able to sit down with the directors and discuss the need for each look. One of the most important things to be established with the directors was how many costume changes were necessary for the show. Figure 14 shows my original costume line up for Jo throughout the play.


The organic nature of the design process allowed us to discuss every detail of the design ideas as a team. In looking at all of these details we found that many of the changes were unnecessary and would not add any understanding of the character or situation. This allowed us to streamline the design concept to eliminate most of the costume changes and replace them with piece changes for the majority of the scenes. We decided that each
character would have a basic outfit with one variation to show seasonal changes unless the
script dictated a full change. In establishing this more streamlined design approach it made
the design process easier and clearer.

Establishing the number of costume changes per character is important to the design
process because it helps to determine how many pieces are needed to rent, buy, pull or build. It helped determine the best use of the money budgeted, made it easier to work within the shop’s ability to get the job done, and reduced the number of rental pieces needed.

People in this period did not have as many garments as we do now, especially since the March family had lost most of its fortune. This limited the number of changes needed. Not having everyone change each time they went offstage helped to keep the characters clear and distinguishable. By limiting the number of complete costume changes, the work to be done in the shop was kept to a manageable volume. Further, it was really unnecessary to have the actors change so often and so completely. By simply adding and changing pieces the characters were more easily identified. It helped accentuate the timeless nature of the play.

Little Women is a musical of reminiscence where Jo is thinking back on her life and remembering the essence of her family and her past. It is not a straight play trying to capture the reality of the world at every moment; things flow quickly and fluently.

After extensive discussions with the directors I did finalized working renderings for each character’s costumes. Following the approval by the directors and Denitsa, my design advisor, of these working sketches I presented them to the rest of the design team, so they could see the costume design plan and coordinate it with their designs. I rendered the garments with particular swatches of fabric in mind based on the color story I had discussed with the directors and the fabrics that seemed most appropriate to us. Once the sketches and swatches were approved we were able to purchase the appropriate lengths of fabric to begin the build process. The working sketches were used in realizing the costumes for the build in the shop and also aided in the selection of the appropriate pulled, rental, and purchased pieces.

I met with the costume shop manager Teri Tavares and my design advisor Denitsa Bliznakova to discuss the various designs. We created lists based on the information I
presented. We discussed different options of actualizing the costumes such as building, renting or purchasing.

The first step was to go through SDSU costume stock and pull everything that might be usable for the show. That allowed me to know what things I might need to buy, rent or build. Once the cast was finalized I was able to start selecting specific pieces to get ready for fittings. After going through the SDSU costume stock I began the process of checking rental houses for the pieces I still needed. We knew we would not be able to build the ball gowns. The other goal was to build as little as possible of the costumes for Aunt March and Marmee. We also wanted to rent as many supplemental men’s pieces as we could find.

Finding costumes from this era was difficult. I went to all the local rental houses and Western Costume in Los Angeles, one of the largest costume rental venues used often by the film and television industry. They have extensive stock but they are extremely expensive for the budgets of shows at SDSU. Not many places had items from this period in stock. Of those who did, most were holding them back for their own shows. The San Diego Opera was a lifesaver; they had an abundance of ball gowns, which gave us enough for the entire ball sequence. The base dress for Aunt March and Amy’s traveling dress also came from there.

Discussions with the shop staff, the directors and Denitsa were held to decide which garments would be built and which ones could be purchased or rented. We decided that building the costume for Jo would be the best way to actualize the design because there were such limited rental options and because of the difficulty of fitting her body type. We also decided to build the rest of the costumes for the girls to ensure the most accurate depiction of the design, to keep them cohesive, tell the color story and keep their characterizations clear. By building the costumes for all four girls we ensured the integrity of the design. In the end we were unable to find more than one piece for Marmee so we had to build the bulk of her costume.

One specific type of garment had to be built in the shop, the corsets that created the period silhouette. Corsets are very expensive to purchase (around $250 for the type we wanted). Generally corsets and undergarments are not rented out, and they take some time to build. We needed 10 corsets of the right style and shape; we had 3 or 4 in stock, which meant that at least 6 corsets would need to be built.
In the shop we had a small group working on this show that did a phenomenal job. Teri and Peter Herman were the drapers who created the patterns and built most of the costumes for the girls. Peter was also the wig master who worked with me on the hair and wig design. He showed me options for purchasing hairpieces that would allow the girls to have appropriate hairstyles and length without the added time of styling their hair before every show. Tahmineh Moyer was the shop assistant as well as being the wardrobe supervisor. She proved herself to be trustworthy as well as a hard working individual, whom I was lucky to have on my team. My assistant Angie Zanolini helped me with everything from renting, pulling, stitching, research and paperwork.
CHAPTER 5
SHOP TIME: BUILDING, RENTING, BUYING,
FITTING AND FINALIZING DESIGN

*Little Women, the Musical* was scheduled to be performed the last weekend in April and the first weekend in May. Normally for a university show the designer can plan on having two months in the shop for fittings. This would include rental, building, alterations, dying, craftwork, and embellishments. It is customary for fittings to coincide with the start of rehearsals. The fittings began in early February the week after rehearsals started.

For *Little Women*, additional time was needed to build the corsets the women needed to wear throughout rehearsals. This meant that the corsets needed to be completed before the beginning of rehearsals in February. We were able to start the building of the corsets early in the process, in December, as we already knew that all six MFA women would be cast. We did not know the exact casting; however, that did not matter for the corset building because the corsets would all be the same silhouette under their outer garments. The shop was able to work on and fit the corsets during winter break when classes were not in session. This also allowed the shop to complete them while not working on another show and ensured that they would be available as soon as rehearsals began.

The rest of the cast fittings began in early February once the cast list had been finalized and we knew who was playing what part. By then I had had an opportunity to pull from stock, go to rental houses and the shop had begun some of the build process.

It was important to take inventory of all the hoop skirts and petticoats that we had in stock and separate/size them by bulk, hoop size and length. I also checked on the shoe inventory because it is important for the performers to get used to wearing the shoes they will have to wear in the production. The women had to become accustomed to being in a period boot and a floor length hoop skirt and/or petticoat running around onstage.

It was necessary to purchase a lot of the menswear because we did not have much in stock, we couldn’t rent it, and there wasn’t enough time to build it. This was an unusual opportunity because normally menswear is rented. For this production, however, we found
that many of the rental houses that I could use were withholding their stock and I had to find alternative sources for the garments that I lacked. Since we were well within budget, Teri and Denitsa gave permission to purchase some of the men’s costumes.

One of the script-dictated costumes was a uniform for Brooke who had enlisted in the Union Army; because of the specialized nature of the Union Army uniform I searched first for rental options for the uniform. Western Costume had uniforms to rent but they were quite expensive. It would have cost around $300 to rent the uniform, plus the cost of driving to and from Los Angeles and paying for dry cleaning. We knew they had one uniform at the San Diego Opera and we were counting on using that. When we contacted them we found that the uniform was oversized and could not have been properly altered to fit the actor playing John Brooke. Teri helped me find a re-creation website that specialized in uniforms and we were able to buy a complete uniform and have it shipped to the shop within two weeks for fittings for about $250, Figure 15 shows the first fitting with the performer.

The fitting process is different for pre-made garments than it is for built items. When fitting a pre-made garment it is about coordinating various elements of the look by putting together different costume pieces until you achieve the look you want. You make sure the actor is wearing everything correctly. Then you see what needs to be taken in or let out and if the length is correct. At this point you can look at other options so that you can see everything together before you make final decisions.

Generally built garments go through a specific process. First the shop builds a mock-up from the actor’s measurements and design renderings supplemented by research imagery for details. Part of the build process is about making sure that the mock-up fabric that you choose is similar to the final fabric so that you can see what it will do and how it will fall. Otherwise when you build the final garment it may not look the way you want or do what it did in fittings.

When the first mock-up is completed, the actor tries it on so that you can see how it fits and if the lines are falling the way they are intended to fall. Depending on what the issues are there may be alterations done to the mock-up to be fit again or a second mock up may be built. Once the basic shape has been done the garment will be built in the real fabric and again fit to the actor. At that point of the process any final changes are done and the shop proceeds to complete the final construction and finishing details of the garment.
For the costumes for the girls we approached the fittings by building the skirts from the real fashion fabric. Doing this in the fashion fabric instead of muslin meant that you didn’t have to build the skirt twice, which would waste time and energy and duplicate effort. We still had the flexibility to alter the skirts if need be. The bodice was built in muslin or some other equivalent fabric (draping slime). This gave us the ability to move forward to the next step. Figure 16 shows the first muslin fitting for Marmee’s bodice, Figure 17 shows the final fitting in the real fabric.
Figure 16. Marmee, played by Susan Jordan DeLeon in first mock-up fitting for bodice. Photo by author.
Working closely with the directors we were able to break down the script and define the needs of each character. One of the biggest challenges was finding the teal colored garments that were desired for Marmee. There was nothing in period to rent in this color and the shop did not have enough time to build it. In the end I found a skirt that was from the turn of the century, which was usable. I knew it was the wrong period but it was teal and it fit the actress. I discussed the viability of this choice with Denitsa first and we decided that as long as the directors understood and were satisfied with the decision we would go with this option. As this was the only piece I could find that was even remotely close to the criteria, and because the shop was willing to build the rest of the costume, we decided to use it.
Up to this point I had been unable to find a teal fabric in an apparel fabric store or from jobbers in Los Angeles that would be satisfactory. I knew that I would have to swatch new fabrics or dye an existing one. I decided to check a local upholstery fabric store and found a cream-colored upholstery fabric with a large pattern that had a small amount of teal in it. I swatched it and did a dye test to deepen the teal and tone the cream. It worked with the teal skirt and so I purchased enough fabric to build the bodice and create a border on the skirt, which helped add to the period feel of the garment and add some interest to the way that it looked. I also found a great period looking pattern when shopping in downtown Los Angeles and we created a period jacket for the winter scenes. We also built a garibaldi blouse from a tan and floral print that complimented the rest of her ensemble.

Jo, as the lead character and a tomboy, needed to have a costume that was different from the other girls’, so I designed her dress with flat knife pleats around the waist and on the bodice. This was a conscious decision based on the research image. Because the pleats are so flat they did not appear as feminine as gathered fabric would have. The lack of femininity was also reinforced by not having many embellishments on her garments and having a simple collar on her top. The research that I based my design on had a pleated skirt that seemed like the appropriate choice for Jo. Translating the bodice was the question; it could be gathered, pleated or a flat shaped piece. When it came to pleating the bodice and draping the yoke I spent a lot of time on a dress form experimenting with different depths of pleats. I needed to find out how far around the bodice they would go as well as whether the yoke should be on the bias or straight of grain, Figure 18 shows two options for the grain of the yoke and my decisions for grain on the sleeve pieces and pleats for the bodice. A garibaldi blouse and bolero vest was also made for Jo.

I wanted Meg to be the most feminine of the girls. The mid-1850’s silhouette with the tiered skirts and light flowing sleeves was an image I was drawn to and I felt was appropriate for Meg. In executing this design, much care was taken in determining the length of each tier and the amount of gathering to create the right proportion for the overskirt. At the first fitting we discovered that the tiers were not long enough to cover the stitch line of the next tier. We took measurements to determine how much additional length we needed in each tier and cut new ones. Because the fabric was so sheer and light it was necessary for the base skirt and bodice to be flatlined. Though our intention was to only use hoopskirts for
Aunt March, the ball room scene, and Amy when she returned from Europe, in the fittings we found that due to the properties of the fabric the skirt collapsed on itself and we needed to use a small hoop to achieve the desired outcome, Figure 19 shows a comparison between the skirt with no hoop and the skirt with a small hoop underneath it. The three gathered tiers were very feminine especially with the lightness of the sleeve and bodice.

In fitting the matching bodice there were several things that needed adjusting. First we fit the lining layer. We did not want the fashion fabric over-layer to be a fitted bodice. I had to experiment with several different options to find out which technique would give us the finished look we wanted. We tried creating a fan that ran from the center waist to the shoulders using different widths of pleats and different ways of gathering the fabric. The gathering looked messy and awkward. We felt the best look was achieved with narrow pleats that created an almost solid lavender look with rows of flowers running between each pleat. Without the pleating it would simply have been a fitted bodice.

We worked on the length and fullness of the two sleeve parts on the actress in the fitting. When we first looked at the sleeve on the actress the lower sleeve appeared uneven and failed to drape properly. We determined that the upper sleeve was causing the problem because it was too tight over her upper arm. We cut it up the middle and inserted a piece of
muslin to give it extra circumference. We also determined that it needed to be slightly longer in order to get the proportions right. Meg’s sleeve from mock-up to final product is pictured in Figure 20.

For her pregnancy Meg needed a different costume. I researched on-line and in books. There was very little information about the garments women wore for pregnancy. The few pictures I found were in formal photos where the women were dressed up and trying to hide their pregnancy. I found some images of contemporary re-creation wear used in the present time. The most helpful images came from a crafts website. It was a pregnancy wrapper intended for a woman to wear around the house during her confinement. The distinguishing characteristic of a wrapper was that it buttoned up the front instead of the back. For a pattern Peter draped the garment on the dress form based on the images. The biggest issues in fitting the wrapper were: the waist needed to be moved up; the sleeve needed to be taken in significantly; the width of the sash needed to be determined; and we needed to figure out where the pleats on the bodice should end. Peter had stitched them down nearly to the waistline and we decided they should end above the bust. The build and fitting process is pictured in Figure 21.
Figure 20. Meg, played by Bethany Elkin, Bodice and sleeve fittings, mock-up to stage. Fitting photos by author. Production photo by Luke Olson 2010.

Figure 21. Meg, played by Bethany Elkin, pregnancy dress from first mock-up to stage. Photos by author.
Amy needed a combination of built garments and rented garments. In Act 1 she remains in her young look, which was built from my renderings and research. Her dress was of pink gingham linen based on my research image. I wanted the fact that she was a child compared to the other girls to be clear. I established this through the shortness of the dress and lack of definition and shaping lines to help reinforce her youth.

For adult Amy I wanted to show both how much she had aged from Act 1 as well as how much more refined and well off she was compared to her sisters, from having been taken under Aunt March’s wing. Due to the size of the show all of her adult garments had to be rented or pulled. This limited my ability to adhere strictly to the color scheme we had established in Act 1 but allowed me to find the best costumes to show the character. The San Diego Opera had a tan traveling dress that was exactly what I had envisioned Amy would wear on returning from Europe. The wedding dress could have gone in many directions. I had originally looked at an extremely fashion forward dress that had many interesting elements but seemed to fall too much in the bustle period. My other idea was to go back into the past and have her in a dress from the romantic period that I had intended to be either her mother’s or more likely Aunt March’s old dress. I found a cream colored dress from this period at the Old Globe which I could rent and while there were several alterations needed, especially in the hem, it worked out great.

When it came to Beth’s costume I wanted her to have a period feel but not to be anything straight out of a history book. Her character is shy and humble. She had no desire to venture out into the world or go to parties, preferring to remain in the home and help her mother and care for her sisters. The premise of her costume was that she had taken an old dress or drapes or cheaply purchased fabric and created her dress herself with a modified period silhouette. Her skirt lacked the fullness that most garments of the period had, and was significantly less full than her sisters or Marmee’s. The simplicity of the inverted box pleats on her skirt ensured the period silhouette while refraining from the soft elegant, decorated feel that gathers would have given and were not the same as Jo’s knife pleats. A simple white cuff and collar added some nice contrast without being overly embellished.

Aunt March was a widow and it was necessary to provide garments that reflected mourning practices in the 1860s. It would have been impossible with the budget and resources we had to obtain more than one dress for Aunt March. The only black dress I was
able to locate was at the San Diego Opera. It needed some alteration and repair to fit nicely. While the skirt fit, I had to create a new over-bodice similar to the one that already existed on the dress because the bodice was four inches too small around. I needed to find fabric to create an insert in the back that came as close as possible to the original fabric of the bodice and skirt. From our stock I found a vintage velvet cloak that she wore for the cold and traveling scenes. For the final scenes the over-bodice was replaced by a cream lace jabot for Amy’s wedding.

I found in designing costumes for the men that this idea of basic pieces was difficult to achieve because there were several situational and script-dictated looks that were required. Brooke needed an Army Uniform, and Brooke and Laurie needed to be in tails for the ball.

We were the most successful at limiting the costume changes to piece changes for Mr. Lawrence and Professor Bhaer. Mr. Lawrence was able to wear the same pants, shirt and cut-away coat throughout the musical. He had three waistcoats throughout and he added an overcoat and top hat for his entrance from the cold in the first act when the scene was in winter.

Professor Bhaer was pure simplicity; he wore the same 2-piece suit with a coordinated waistcoat in all of his scenes. Professor Bhaer was from Germany where he taught as a professor, a very different background than any of the other men in the story. I was able to purchase Professor Bhaer’s entire ensemble from a local western shop (Wild Bills) that carries period re-creation wear. Western recreation wear looks very much like the menswear from the late nineteenth century. The slight differences were inconsequential and would not be noticed by most members of the audience. The only costume change was the addition of a scarf and overcoat for the final scene in Act 2. I purchased a two-piece brown pin stripe suit from the store’s catalog and a period four-pocket vest in a lighter tan directly from the store’s stock.

I have used Wild Bills for every show I have done and found them to be exceptionally accommodating and reliable. Wild Bills normally carries only the larger sizes in stock; smaller sizes may be ordered from the catalog and will be delivered within two days. As a general rule I have found the best method for selecting and fitting garments from this store is to purchase them in the closest size they have in stock. I then have the actors try them on. This lets me see if the pattern, color and cut of the garment is what I’m looking for. I could
then determine if it was better to alter the garment from the larger size or purchase a smaller size.

Unlike the Professor and Mr. Lawrence, the character of John Brooke had several completely different costumes as prescribed by the script. His first appearance was at the Moffat’s formal ball. For this scene he was in period formal wear which included a tuxedo tailcoat. The actor had extremely long arms, which made finding a tailcoat with the right measurements difficult. I could not find one in stock or at a rental house. I was able to purchase a new coat for him in the correct measurements at a local formal wear store. The shirt also needed sleeve extensions due to the actors arm length. It was difficult to find flat fronted tux trousers with tapered legs; it was especially difficult for this actor because he had a slim waist and very long legs. I was able to find them at a rental house and so we did not need to buy them.

In his next appearance he is wearing an army uniform. We purchased the uniform from a re-creation web site and received it within a couple of weeks. We scheduled a fitting with the actor and discovered the uniform would need a great deal of alteration. The easiest alteration was dropping the hem of the pants. The jacket needed a lot of work. There were several problems with the shoulders that needed to be addressed: the seams had not been properly pressed; there was something wrong with the shoulder pads; the sleeves had not been set in properly. It was necessary to replace the shoulder pads; remove and reset the sleeves; and properly press the seams to make sure everything laid flat. Due to the length of the actor’s arms the sleeves were too short. There was an inner pocket made from the same material as the jacket that we removed and used to extend both sleeves with decorative piping at the join. The pocket was replaced with an alternative material. The muslin shirt that came with the uniform needed to have the sleeves extended. The belt was too long and had to be cut down and new holes put in it.

In Act 2 Brooke is seen for the first time in ordinary clothing. He had two looks: trousers with a waistcoat and a shirt with the sleeves rolled up when he helped move the piano; trousers with shirt, a new waistcoat and an added jacket for the wedding preparation scene. For all of Act 2 he only needed to have piece changes.

For the character of Laurie my wish was to show age progression. Starting as a young boy in Act 1, he wore a short jacket pulled from stock, which was period for that age.
Other than the ball scene, he is able to wear the same shoes, pants and vest until the last scene when he is in shirtsleeves. Part of the design concept for Laurie was the idea of light colors as a child evolving to darker colors as an adult. There was a pair of light grey period slacks in stock. We had to do some significant alterations to the waist to get them to fit and they needed to be hemmed up. His shirt was pulled from stock in his size and his light brown vest was purchased in his size from Wild Bills.

Act 2 showed that Laurie had aged and was now an adult. His color scheme was over-all darker: dark grey trousers that were more streamlined; a dark brown plaid vest; and a dark brown jacket. When he first entered he had on an overcoat and top hat, which he immediately removed. For the final scene where they are preparing for the wedding Laurie repeats the same shirt, pants and waistcoat from the previous scenes but he removed the jacket. The fittings were fairly simple. The trousers were purchased from Wild Bills and only needed to be hemmed. He wore the same shirt that he wore in Act 1. The vest was purchased from Wild Bills in his size. The jacket was rented from the Globe. The overcoat was pulled from stock and did not need altering. The hat was pulled from stock.
CHAPTER 6

THE OPERATIC TRAGEDY

The Operatic tragedy was a really fun part of the musical that I greatly enjoyed working on it. It is the audience’s foray into Jo’s bold and uninhibited imagination. It was meant to reflect the more sensational tales that Alcott, and her heroine Jo, preferred to write. With the “operatic tragedy” scenes at the beginning of Act I and II we enter Jo’s fantasy world. It was important to ensure that the look of the Operatic Tragedy appeared different from the rest of the play. The audience should immediately know that these are not characters from the 1860’s. As it is for Jo, hopefully the Operatic Tragedy moments in the musical are an escapist experience, sinking into fantasy to make sense of reality. As a team we worked hard to ensure that all the elements of the Tragedy worked together.

The character of Clarissa bursts onto the scene as a damsel in distress running from the villain Braxton. Suddenly Rodrigo appears to shield her from harm and allows her to escape. Clarissa is searching for her sister and along the way meets a hag, a troll and a knight who, in exchange for her belongings, aid her in navigating the forest. In the end, Braxton is slain by Rodrigo II who reveals herself to be Clarissa’s long lost sister.

When I did my preliminary research I found some imagery that was the jumping off point for my design process, pictured in Figure 22. I began this before casting was completed and some of the design was dependent on knowing the actors who would play the roles. Would it be double cast by the leads or cast as a separate ensemble; or as it turned out; a hybrid of the two where three characters were double cast with the remainder being made up from ensemble members? The actor who played Mr. Lawrence also played Rodrigo, the actress who played Beth also played Rodrigo II and the actress who played Amy also played Clarissa (though this was a last minute change due to recasting). The ensemble that also portrayed ballroom dancers at the Moffat’s ball in Act 1 played the rest of the “tragic” characters.

Since casting would affect the way I would be able to dress the actors I had to think of this design in two ways: how to design for a double cast, and how to design should an
ensemble play all the parts? One of my big questions for the directors was how much we wanted the girls’ reality to bleed into the fantasy and vice versa.

I found some excellent inspiring research where people were dressing up and putting on shows (Figure 22). This is how I envisioned the March girls would play out the Operatic Tragedy at home. It also gave me an idea for the color scheme, semi-monochromatic or
sepia tone. This was reinforced by the research image that Virginia brought for her idea behind the Operatic Tragedy. The concept was that there would be a small amount of color pop, but overall its color theme would be as though it were an 1860’s era photograph in sepia tones.

After some extensive researching and redesigning I brought my ideas back to the directors and fellow designers. By this time Virginia also had a color model; I was a little surprised to see how bright and colorful it was as seen in Figure 23. Based on the image she had originally brought to the table (Figure 23) I had imagined just a touch of color - a variation of parchment color. Instead it was full of deep jewel-toned greens and blues with more color than sepia. At first I was taken aback by the brightness, but then I realized that now I would have fewer constraints on my choices because I would not be as limited by the color scheme. One of the goals in designing the show was that the operatic tragedy, while a very important part of the show, would be primarily pulled or rented from free sources. This was necessary because of a lack of manpower and budget. The change in color scheme facilitated being able to pull more items from stock.


After seeing Virginia’s color model and how she had punched up the color aspect and covered a large portion of the visible set, I went back to the drawing board to come up with
another concept for the Operatic Tragedy to be consistent with her color scheme. Starting with Clarissa I found some classic images from pre-Raphaelite art, many of which featured a woman with long hair in a white dress in medieval style, which seemed like the right idea for Clarissa. Figure 24 shows the new direction that my research went it for the Operatic Tragedy.

Rodrigo was meant to be a great hero. Unfortunately in most of the paintings I found, a knight seemed to be the main hero figure. This did not work, as there was already a knight character in the Tragedy, and the hero could not be the same as the knight. So I looked to other medieval and renaissance art for Rodrigo’s inspiration. Eventually he became something like a musketeer. The knight was pretty straightforward and the hag and troll were drawn from various sources of fantastical drawings and renaissance fair randomness. Originally I intended to keep Braxton on the dark end of the spectrum, as he was the villain. He maintained a similar feel to Rodrigo.

In designing Rodrigo and Rodrigo II I first needed to define this character. Essentially, he is the hero in Jo’s stories. In my initial research I was envisioning him as an old-fashioned romantic from the early 1800’s as though he pulled out the clothes from Mr. Lawrence’s youth. In redesigning I knew he could not be the romantic knight of the pre-Raphaelite imagery.

I began to look into other works of the periods portrayed in pre-Raphaelite art, mostly medieval art or art representing this time. I decided on the image of a musketeer. I knew that due to the budget and the demands already on the shop I would have to do my best to rent or buy this costume and it would need to have only minor alterations. Not only did I need to find the right clothing pieces, I needed to have two of the same. This would be a challenge because it would need to fit a large athletically built man and a petite woman, and they would need to be seen at the same time at one point onstage.

I looked through stock initially, but was unable to find anything appropriate to dress both actors in matching dress due to the large size difference (between a small woman and a large man). Since I still had some time to look for these pieces, I checked at the rental houses for matching pieces that might be alterable or fit as they were. I was still unable to find anything workable. Then it was all about finding something in stock that would work. I pulled several pairs of khaki knee breeches and found 3 matching shirts. The shirt for Rodrigo fit but had very little ease and was too short. Using the extra shirt, I requested that we add several inches to the bottom of the first shirt and ensured that his waist sash would cover the seam. Figure 25 and 26 show the initial fittings for Rodrigo and Rodrigo II. The final shirt for Rodrigo II was rather roomy, so it was taken in almost everywhere and the length was left alone. I found 2 matching sashes with similar decoration. The red wasn’t
Figure 25. Rodrigo, played by Rafi Cedeno fitting. Photo by author.
exactly the same but it was close enough. Luckily, we had 2 pairs of riding boots in stock that matched and fit each of the actors.

The Operatic Tragedy was one of the toughest parts of the show to design and went through many variations. Figure 27 shows the opening of the Operatic Tragedy and Figure 28 shows the ending tableau including Jo, Mrs. Kirk and Professor Bhaer.
Figure 27. The operatic tragedy. Photo by Luke Olson 2011.

Figure 28. Operatic tragedy final tableau. Photo by Luke Olson 2011.
CHAPTER 7

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

There are always challenges in executing a design. Time, money and manpower are important to keep in mind and any or all of them can cause roadblocks to the final product. One has to remain flexible, think quickly and find clever solutions to resolve problems effectively in a short period. Furthermore, staying close to the initial inspiration and research helps when one gets lost in the design process. The production of Little Women was no exception. While bringing the show to life the designers experience a number of bumps in the road.

Part way through the process the costume shop hit a stopping point when the co-director Paula Kalustian was reading a biography of Louisa May Alcott. In the biography, Alcott was quoted as commenting that the corset in fashion, which cinched in so small at the waist, was so expensive that she and her family were unable to afford to wear this undergarment. After reading this biography, Paula was concerned that the girls would be misrepresented if the actresses were wearing corsets as part of their costumes. A period of further research and discourse ensued to agree on the resolution for this issue. All women wore corsets during this period, but not all corsets had the extreme shaping and tiny waist cinching of the fashionable corset to which Alcott was referring, which had come into fashion during this time. We had to decide if we wanted to continue on the corset route for some or all of the girls.

The building process was put on hold while we were working to resolve the issue. This issue created a most significant problem for Jo, as she was both the lead and the actress whose silhouette was most altered by the corset or lack thereof. Not having a corset affects the way that the garment is built and fits, as well as the way that it looks to the eye. It can change the actresses’ measurements, in some cases, by inches. After discussing the differences in corsets and how they would affect the silhouettes, we decided to keep things as we had originally planned. The corsets did not shape too extremely; they just helped hold everything in place and enhance the period silhouette. It did not affect the actresses’ ability
to move, breathe or perform; the actress playing Jo in fact found it helpful to get into character while wearing it.

The corset discussion continued when deciding on the type of undergarments for the characters of Beth and Amy. Amy ages through the course of the play and Beth is sickly and never really goes out into society. For Beth and Young Amy I chose to use compression sports bras to help minimize their bustline and to reinforce the appearance of youth (or in Beth’s case underdevelopment due to ill health).

Some of the most challenging issues during this production were the scant resources for renting costumes. The school stock had very little in the way of clothing from this period. There were some useful shirts, collars, pants and a couple of frock coats, but beyond that we lacked many of the garments needed to create the characters. The women’s garments were also lacking. We had plenty of hoop skirts and petticoats for rehearsal, but there were not enough hoops in the correct size and shape to use in the show.

I was able to rent Aunt March’s dress and all of the ball gowns from the San Diego Opera, which all had corresponding hoops. The petticoats for the girls and Marmee were built in the SDSU shop for their everyday clothes in the fullness and shape that best fit the appropriate silhouette. We were also able to use some of the petticoats from stock for the ensemble cast.

Some of the rental challenges we had were that La Jolla Playhouse was no longer renting outside of the UC system so we could not look for any items from their stock, as I had been able to in the past. The Old Globe was doing a show in a similar period so they would only allow limited rentals within the Civil War period and no menswear was available until towards the end of my time for fittings and alteration in the shop, and then only on approval. I contacted Lambs Players who were also doing a show in the same time period. They were not releasing any menswear and would only allow some women’s wear out. Further, they did not have much selection that worked for the characters and the period that would fit the actors. By the time I got in to see their stock I was looking for very particular things in specific sizes. I found a new rental house locally, Christian Youth Theatre. While they did not have an abundance of nice period pieces, I did manage to find several pieces that helped to complete some of the men’s outfits and a teal skirt that became the base of Marmee’s costume.
There was also a lack of manpower in the shop, especially compared to my past experiences in working in the SDSU shop. While our shop was skilled, only four people were able to consistently work on the show. There were an unusually small number of undergraduate students available from the costume tech classes to help out during this time, and most of the graduate assistants were also unable to work in the shop during this time.

Even so, we built a large quantity of period pieces in a relatively short period of time. Teri Tavares and Peter Herman did the majority of the building and altering. Tahmineh Moyer, an undergraduate theatre design student, assisted with alteration, as well as doing all of the construction and finishing of young Amy’s dress.

On Friday about a week before the first dress rehearsal, we were informed that Marina Inserra, who had been cast as Amy, had a last minute schedule change and would have to step away from the production. At this point the director had to decide whether to replace Marina with the understudy for all performances or only for those performances Marina would not be available for. We waited to find out what the next step would be.

On Monday we confirmed that Michelle Tymich would take over the role of Amy. She had been cast in the roles of Clarissa in the Operatic Tragedy and as an ensemble dancer at the ball. She had also been the second choice to play Amy and subsequently been made the understudy for Beth, Meg, and Amy. Now she had to step into the role and the costumes. We furiously scheduled costume fittings for her to try on the built and altered garments and see what kind of changes needed to be made. Interestingly, while the girls had very different body types they had similar measurements around. Some alteration was still needed on all of the garments.

The young Amy dress was hardest to fit mostly because it had been built to fit Marina, who had much narrower shoulders than Michelle and there was barely any spare fabric so re-cutting any portion of the dress was not an option. Putting in gussets under the arms and letting out all of the seams in the yoke and shoulder area was necessary to give Michelle enough room to move. The dress also looked a little snuggier than it had on Marina.

We had to order new falls because Marina was a brunette and Michelle was a blonde, so unfortunately we could not use the same hair. Luckily the hair was readily available and we already knew what color to get because we had ordered Michelle a long blond fall for Clarissa. The company shipped quickly.
The other issue that arose was shoes; I had one pair of black boots for Michelle to wear as Clarissa, but for Amy I had wanted brown flat boots as a child and ideally white or cream boots when she grows up in Act 2. There was only one pair of shoes in stock that fit Michelle by this time as all of our period boots were being worn by other actresses and it would have been costly with no guarantees that it would arrive on time if we tried to order them. Fortunately, she wore the same shoe size as I do and I just happened to own a pair of brown flat period looking boots and a pair of cream boots.

Michelle could not complete her quick change from Clarissa into Young Amy due to difficulty in untangling and retying her boots. This was easy enough to resolve. I conferred with Brandon and we agreed that we should cut the shoe change for Clarissa in Act 1. She had more time to change from Clarissa into adult Amy in Act 2 so that was not a problem.

When Marina left and was replaced by Michelle, Rachel Dexter, an undergraduate performance major, stepped into Michelle’s ensemble role for the ball. Prior to the changes, Rachel had only played Mrs. Kirk. We needed to do new fittings for her for the ball scene. Rachel was significantly smaller than Michelle so we were unable to fit her into the same ball gown that Michelle would have worn. There was one dress we had rented from the Opera and had not yet been assigned. After another last minute fitting, we were able to alter the ball gown for Rachel.

Late in the process – two days before the beginning of tech week, we discovered that there was insufficient changing space onstage, which was not clearly indicated on the ground plan. Even though Virginia and I discussed the circumference and bulk of the skirts on multiple occasions, in the final set there was not enough room for the women to move and get by. We did not foresee the backstage and crossover space issue; a motor took up the entire space of the stage left wing. This kept anyone in a hoop skirt from passing through the farthest upstage wing or having many people in the wing at any one time. This could have been avoided if I had checked the stage a bit sooner.

The other logistics problem we had was the masking on the apron side stage where Jo spends a great deal of the show. There was supposed to be a masking curtain behind Jo’s writing desk. I did not realize until it was already up and too late to change, that the masking had been placed along the wall and did not give her any changing space on the stage without going upstage of the proscenium, which added extra time to each of her quick changes.
Through all of these trials, communication with the shop, directors, actors and fellow designers was the key to making sure that a reasonable and prompt solution was achieved to all of these challenges. Going back to my research, using the advice of my fellow designers, the directors and my advisors helped to make the best and fastest solution to satisfy everyone involved.
CHAPTER 8

THE DYEING AND CRAFTS THAT COMPLETED
THE DESIGN OF LITTLE WOMEN

The SDSU production of Little Women required a large amount of dyeing and some specialized craftwork. As someone who enjoys dyeing I never limit myself when swatching to the color of the fabric. Since I was unable to find any appropriate lavender fabric for Meg, I was comfortable knowing that I would be able to achieve the desired color by using a dyeable fabric. I found several pink prints and stripes that had the look and feel that I wanted, so I got a swatch and did a dye test to ensure that I would be able to make it the color I needed. This also gave me something to show Paula and Brandon so that they could see where I was going with the fabric I had chosen. I discussed the fabric prints and weights with Teri and Denitsa to get their expertise on how it would fall and which patterns were the most appealing and period accurate. From the swatches I presented, we were able to narrow them down to one ideal option with a couple of back-ups in case it was not approved by the directors. Brandon approved the fabric and we bought 17 yards of the lightweight pink and white patterned cotton. I did some more dye swatches to get the color where I wanted it and then washed and dyed the fabric until I was satisfied with the color. Interestingly, once the fabric was dry it appeared as though it was very pink and dull, but we found that if it was layered over a white fabric or itself it gained richness and reverted to a slightly more purple tone.

The teal color desired for Marmee’s dress eluded me. When it was clear that I would not find any existing pieces that would work with the skirt that I rented from the Christian Youth Theatre, I looked for a dyeable fabric and found an upholstery fabric that might work. I did a dye test to see if would take color, which was successful. This enabled us to use it to build the bodice and a shaped border to go with the rented skirt.

For Beth I found a fabric with an 1860’s print. It was cream in color, and 100% cotton, which ensured that it would take dye and allowed for wider color intensity
possibilities. Once I test dyed the swatches and got approval from Brandon, we purchased the fabric. Between the time I swatched the fabric and the time I went back to the store to purchase it, a large portion of the bolt had been sold. Only half of the length we needed for the garment was left. There was another fabric that I had swatched that was similar, so we bought the remainder of the yardage in that fabric. I did some more finessing of the shade of yellow and once it had been approved I dyed the fabrics together to ensure that they would have the same intensity and be the same color. The original fabric was used to create the bodice and main portion of the skirt; the second fabric was used as a border on the skirt, to make a belt, and create piping.

Once all the garments were dyed and built, the lighting designer, Luke, and I took them into the light lab. He used the gels he was planning to use in his design to light the garments. The purpose of this test was to see how the gel colors affected the colors of the garments. The goal was to enhance the color of the garments and not wash them out. He made a few small color adjustments, especially in the ambers, to best suit the costumes and still maintain the integrity of his lighting design.

The character of Rodrigo/Rodrigo II is meant to be an over-the-top romantic figure out of Jo’s most preposterous fantasy world. Hiding somewhere in stock I managed to find a large brimmed felt hat that had been covered and shaped for a previous show. It was the only one in stock, so without enough time to order a second one I decided the best course of action would be to create a buckram copy and cover both with the same fabric and embellishment. This also gave me the ability to resize, reshape and rewire the brim and size the second hat to fit the significantly smaller actress who was playing Rodrigo II. This would not have been as much of an issue if the two characters/actors did not have to be onstage at the same time and were not so extremely different in size. I also had to take into account that Rodrigo II’s fall of sausage curls needed to be tucked into her hat as part of her disguise.

In Act 1, when Meg and Jo are getting ready to go to the ball, Amy points out that the dress has a scorch mark on the back (because Jo stood too close to the fire). Marmee told Jo that the dress would be just fine with the addition of a small patch, which she needs to “sew” onto Jo’s dress onstage. This added the challenge that not only did we need to have a dress with a patch on it, but that it had to be easily placed on Jo’s dress, by the actress onstage, in front of the audience, and had to be removed after each show. Finding the right fabric that
was obviously different from the dress, but not significantly different, was a challenge because I was unable to take the gown with me to match the fabric. Luckily I was able to find a reasonable fabric in our remnant stock. Once the fabric was approved, Brandon and I discussed the size of the patch. Peter Herman helped me with ideas for how to attach the piece. I knew that the patch would need to be applied quickly and, if at all possible, noiselessly. Peter came up with the idea of using magnets, which worked out perfectly. The magnets were sewn into a pocket, which was attached to the inside of the dress. Washers were placed in the patch in the same locations as the magnets. All that had to be done every night was to preset the patch in the sewing basket onstage so Marmee could place it on the dress and pretend to stitch it on quickly. The patch can be seen in Figure 29.

Figure 29. Patch on Jo’s ball gown. Photo by author.
Another project I had to take on was creating sword belts and attaching scabbards for Braxton, Rodrigo, and Rodrigo II. First I needed to obtain the swords and scabbards from the props department. In the fittings with the actors I chose existing sword belts making sure that the two for Rodrigo and Rodrigo II were the same color and style and attempting to make the size proportionate to the actors sizes. In some cases I had to change lengths or create new pieces for the scabbard to hang from. Some hardware needed to be replaced and I used pound rivets to secure the new leather straps to the belts.
CHAPTER 9

HAIR: THE MAGIC OF FALLS

Just as it was important to distinguish the girls from one another in the silhouette and color of their costumes, I also wanted to give them distinct hairstyles that fit their status and personality/demeanor, as I saw them.

Jo had to show off her hair as it is mentioned many times in the script and it had to be long, Jo’s long fall used throughout most of Act 1 is pictured in Figure 30. This point was very important to Paula and Brandon, because there is a significant moment in the musical when Jo decides to “sacrifice” her hair to sell to give money to Marmee for their father in the hospital. The style was a little less period accurate than some of the other girls’ hair, but it was more about showcasing the length so that it is more dramatic when she cuts it. Jo has several hairstyle changes throughout the musical; some needed to be effected in a very short period of time. Through discussions with Peter we decided that going with a fall would be the best decision, because it would be a quick and effective way to change the length of the hair without having to restyle it each time. Figure 31 shows my research for various lengths for Jo’s hair and the basic idea of how I wanted it to be pulled back which had to have some effect on hiding the line where the fall was attached.

Amy had a youthful abundance of small tight curls that became longer and a bit looser when she grew up but kept the same feel. I found the drawing in a Tom Tierney Civil War coloring book; the short tight curls with the small bows to pull them off the face felt just right for Amy. Keeping a similar style into her adulthood was important for continuity of character. For adult Amy’s hair I found an image of a woman in a traveling suit with a hat perched on her neatly done hair, which was how I imagined Amy might return home from Europe.

Beth had large sausage curls that had a youthful and unsophisticated feel to them that helped show her character. I went through several research pictures trying to find the right look for Beth. Many of the hairstyles that I found were not quite what I was looking for but felt like they were close to what I wanted. I showed my basic idea to Peter and he brought
Figure 30. Jo in long fall. Photo by author.

out his arsenal of research and hair and wig catalogs so we could discuss even more options. One thing that was important was to keep her curls from being too similar to either of Amy’s curly looks. In the end we found some research pictured in Figure 32, to support the simple large sausage curls which were nothing like the hairstyles the other girls had. They were in the same vein as the styles I had been looking at in my research.

Meg, being the oldest and most mature, as well as the most conscious of how she looked, had a lovely up-do that fit the period nicely. It kept her looking refined and coiffed, and quite similar to Marmee. To support the passage of time and Meg’s different ages, I gave her several hair accessories. For regular days she wore a snood over her bun to keep it neat and add personality. For the ball she had a decorative braid across the top of her head.

**Figure 32. Beth hair research and final product.**
and decorative flowers. For her pregnancy, when she would have been confined to the house, she wore a mobcap. Theses various hairstyles and accessories are pictured in Figure 33.

![Meg Hair Research](image)


Marmee’s hair had a similar look to Meg’s, but softer with no decorations.

In general the men all styled their own hair based on the research images I shared with them. For the ball I wanted a slicked down look, which all of the boys could do with water, a comb and/or some gel. For Laurie, I found a period image of a young man with a bit of a pompadour (Figure 34). Peter helped teach the actor playing Laurie how to create this look himself every night.

In my original design Mr. Lawrence had sideburns, which were intended to add some age and distinguish him from the other men. In practice, they did not add much and there wasn’t time to replace them in his quick changes from Rodrigo to Mr. Lawrence. They did not work for Rodrigo, as his hair was rather short. To achieve the aging effect Mr. Lawrence needed the actor applied grey hair color and a small amount of aging make-up every night.

Tim Allen played Professor Bhaer, as well as a ballroom dancer. I wanted Professor Bhaer to have somewhat unkempt messy hair and a moustache. Professor Bhaer’s basic costume, hair and moustache looks are pictured in Figure 35. We taught Tim how to apply
the moustache so that he could apply it himself every night. When Tim switched to the ball scene he simply used water and a comb to slick his hair down. There was plenty of time for him to reapply the moustache and allow his hair to dry, so that he could mess it up for the return of Professor Bhaer at the beginning of Act 2.

In the Operatic Tragedy most of the characters’ heads were covered so we did not need to deal with hair styles. The knight and the hag wore a hood and the troll wore a headpiece that covered its hair. Braxton wore a renaissance style hat. Rodrigo and Rodrigo
II had large brimmed cavalier hats. The actress who portrayed Rodrigo II (Clarissa’s sister) maintained her Beth sausage curls and hid them in her cavalier hat until the onstage reveal where they cascaded down as she removed the hat. Finally, Clarissa had a long blond fall, as called for by the script, and supported by my pre-Raphaelite research.
CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

The costume design for Little Women really created the world that the characters and the story live in, and helped establish this world for the audience in a way that lighting and the set could not. Through the use of color, period silhouette, and well-conceived traits for the girls especially, I was able to bring the fashion of the 1860’s together with the status and personalities of the girls to create a cohesive but differentiated family.

Limitations in the availability of period clothing in SDSU’s stock and rental resources required that most of the costumes be built or purchased. Since I was able to find appropriate and affordable fabrics to build a large percentage of the women’s costumes, I had sufficient budget to purchase the menswear that I needed to best fulfill my designs. In the end the show looked amazing thanks to the work of the design team, and the incredible costume team in the shop.

Through collaboration with the design team and careful designing and planning, the costumes were exactly as they should have been; not dwarfed by the set and size of the stage, nor an overwhelming element on the stage. The stage on which Little Women was performed is the largest one at SDSU, which meant that costume elements could not be minimal. The role of the costumes is to support all other aspects of the production and to underscore the performance of the actors. This objective was achieved.

When I first started the process of researching and designing my thesis show, I felt intimidated and nervous. The collaborative efforts of the costume shop, my fellow designers and the directors provided great support to ensure that the final product was artistically, visually, and aurally successful. I learned that through collaboration even the most daunting and difficult challenge is made achievable and easier through the sharing of ideas and inspiration. Constant communication with the directors, fellow designers, the actors and the costume shop contributed to keep everything on track and allowed for the best possible outcome - the creation of the world you desired that best served the production as a whole.
That is the thing I love about theatre; that even if it is not your discipline area, you are still able to give valuable and meaningful contributions to the other parts of the process. You also grow in your understanding of the other disciplines.

*Little Women* was one of the most successful productions in recent years at SDSU with sold-out shows and rave reviews. In the end the show looked phenomenal thanks to the wonderful work of the design team and performers. Figure 36 shows the entire cast in their curtain call look with the director Brandon Maier and myself.

![Figure 36. The cast dressed for curtain call with the author and director Brandon Maier. Photo by Zwink Photography 2010.](image)

I know that three years ago when I began graduate school, I hoped, but was never certain, that I had what it took to get it done. Through this thesis project, I have learned that I am capable of overcoming challenges, working together with my team members, and embracing my vision of a production. This experience has given me confidence and a great sense of satisfaction.
REFERENCES

Alcott, L. M. Little Women. London: Dean, 1992


