

Little Women Grace the Clear Space Stage in Rehoboth

Clear Space Theatre Company is in rehearsal for its May production of LITTLE WOMEN: THE MUSICAL, the 2005 Broadway musical rendition of Louisa May Alcott's classic story *Little Women*. The show opens on May 1 for three weekends at the theatre in Rehoboth Beach. Two real-life "little women" – 14-year-old Jamie Ditzel and 17-year-old Rose Slavin – are enjoying their first experiences in an adult, main stage show.

For the past few years, the two girls have studied in Clear Space's youth series, specifically its Summer Intensive and Spotlight on Young Performers programs, but now they are enjoying the opportunity to soak in the spotlight among the adults in the main stage company.

Ditzel, who is playing Amy (the primmest of the iconic March sisters) has been performing since she was 8-years-old in community shows, theatre camps, and high school productions. Her favorite roles have included Miss Millie Wilchick in *Infancy* by Thornton Wilder and Miss Dorothy in Clear Space's 2014 Spotlight on Young Performers production of *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

But in January, Ditzel decided to audition for Clear Space's adult season.

"I auditioned for this season at Clear Space because I'd had such a great time in the youth shows, and I loved the shows they were doing," Ditzel explained. "I honestly didn't expect to get a part or even a callback. I knew there were a lot of adults with more experience than me, so I figured it'd be good practice to just go through the audition process."

Slavin, who will be portraying Beth (the most good-natured March girl), felt the same way.

"Auditioning for the Clear Space season was kind of an on-the-whim decision," she shared. "I didn't even expect to get any roles, but I wanted to get the audition experience."

Slavin began her stage experience back when her mother encouraged her to audition for a production of *The Wizard of Oz* at Children's Theatre Inc. in Dover. Since then, she has enjoyed performing in Dover High School productions as well as in three summers of Clear Space's Summer Intensive Program. Most recently, she was featured as Ariel in Clear Space's Spotlight on Young Performers production of *The Little Mermaid*.

Both girls admit that the adult rehearsal process has been quite different from that of the younger theater programs.

"I love the maturity and the fact that everyone wants to be there," Slavin shared. "Everybody wants to sit down and get everything done as soon as we all get to rehearsal."

Of course, working with an older group has also presented its challenges for the two.

"It's been challenging just because even though it's fun working with adult actors, it's also really intimidating because I want to make sure I do a really good job for them," Ditzel confessed.

“The thing that was hard to get used to was the fast-paced learning,” Slavin added. “Some of these people have been performing for twice as long as I have – and it shows. These people are professionals and keeping up with them has been a great challenge.”

On top of the demands of the rehearsal process, Slavin and Ditzel have been dealing with long commutes to rehearsals. Slavin is a Dover resident, while Ditzel resides in Berlin, MD. Each of the girls has had to endure a least a 45-minute commute to and from rehearsal three or four days a week since rehearsals began in late March.

“I get out of school at 2:30 and have to leave Dover by 4:30 to get to a 6:00 rehearsal,” Slavin expounded. “That two-hour break is usually spent on homework or catching up on sleep. That leaves for less of a social life than I’m used to, but I’m well aware that the opportunity to work on this show is worth it.”

Ditzel herself is dismissed from school at 2:45, after which she volunteers with her district’s middle school drama class until 4:30, just in time to leave Berlin for a 6:00 rehearsal in Rehoboth. She said that by the time she gets home around 10:00, she has to go to bed just to be able to get up the next morning.

“It has been a little tricky balancing [the show] and school, mostly because I don’t really have time for anything else,” Ditzel admitted. “It’s sometimes hard to find time to do things, but I guess I’m doing pretty good because I’ve been able to keep up with school work. I usually do homework on the way to rehearsal.”

Despite their personal challenges, both young ladies are enjoying the experience and look forward to the final product. According to Ditzel, she’s not only enjoying the camaraderie among the cast, but also the complexity of her character.

“Amy is the brat of the family, at least at first. When she grows up, she learns manners and poise and becomes a woman of society,” she narrated. “Even though she makes bad choices and mistakes at times, I think all-in-all she’s a good person, and it’s been a lot of fun exploring the different layers to her.”

Slavin is most excited about Clear Space’s opening night talkback, an opportunity after the show on that first night of the show’s run for the audience to converse with the cast after the show.

“I can’t wait to hear the actual audience’s reaction to the first performance,” she exclaimed.

LITTLE WOMEN: THE MUSICAL opens on Friday, May 1st at 7pm and runs for three weekends until May 17th with shows at 7 pm on Fridays and Saturdays and 3 pm on Sundays. The production is sponsored by Devon Engineering, LLC. The theatre is located at 20 Baltimore Ave. in Rehoboth Beach. Tickets can be purchased at www.clearspacetheatre.org or by calling 302.227.2270.