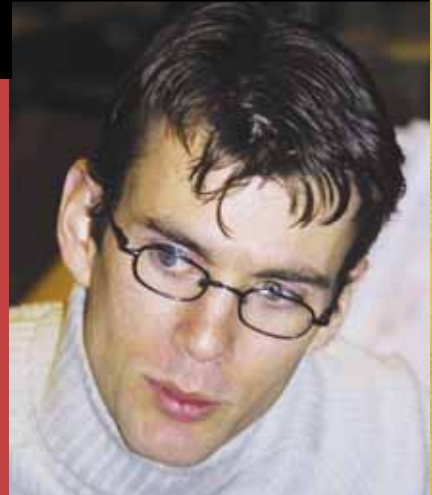


## Jason Howland: Composer

**IF YOU KNEW A FEW FUN FACTS ABOUT JASON HOWLAND, YOU MIGHT SAY HE** was destined to be the composer for the Broadway production of *Little Women: The Musical*. Take, for example, the fact that he was born in Concord, Massachusetts—the very same home town of the March family in *Little Women*, as well as its author, Louisa May Alcott. Or that when Jason was in his early teens, he had already written his first musical score for another classic tale, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, while at a theater summer camp. On Broadway, Jason would go on to become a conductor for *Les Misérables* and music supervisor for *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *The Civil War*, just to name a few of his credits. While he was busy casting for the national tour of *Little Women*, Jason was kind enough to grant *MA!* backstage access to his rising musical career.



BY VERONICA DOMINGUEZ

### What got you hooked on musicals?

Since I was about 5, I'd been coming down to New York City to see musicals with my grandparents. I thought they were really great. The first musical I ever saw was *Annie*, and that prompted me to think that I wanted to be in musicals before I realized I was a pathetically bad actor.

### How did you break into show business?

The summer after my junior year of college, a friend got me a job as an intern on a professional workshop of *Jekyll & Hyde*—and I got the donuts and coffee [laughs]. After a couple of weeks, Frank Wildhorn, the composer, learned I could read music and play the piano, and I started to take care of loose ends in the music. At the end of the summer, I was suddenly hired to be the second pianist. I then became Frank's music assistant when I graduated college. Later, when *Jekyll & Hyde* went on national tour, he gave me the job of conductor. When it came to Broadway,

I came in as the conductor and music director of the production.

### How did you become involved with other musical productions?

It's mostly reputation. For a lot of the shows I've been involved with, I've worked as a conductor, music director, or arranger. For instance, I was asked to be the final conductor of *Les Misérables* in New York, and that was based on good reputation: doing good work and having other people like your work, and having the talent to back it up.

### Now you have your own musical. Do you have a favorite song in *Little Women*?

"Days of Plenty." We needed a second act number where Marmee helps Jo move past the death of her sister, Beth. So we needed something that was life-affirming, hopeful, powerful, and emotional. It was not a small task, but the song ended up working really well.

### What was it like writing that song?


It took a lot of writing. Musicals are

hard that way because you have an idea of the kind of emotional response and moment you want to achieve in a show, but you really don't know if you've achieved it until you have an audience. So you might work on a song for three years, and then find out as soon as it's in front of an audience that it's completely wrong. That song, however, we had right from the start.

### So, to deliver those songs perfectly, casting must be important, right?

Yes, I'm very involved. I look for the essence in the actor to match the essence of the character, so when you see him or her onstage, you don't see someone *acting* the role, it's really more like someone *being* the role. It's hard to be special, and ultimately you want people who are special on the stage.

### What do you enjoy and hate about composing?

I like that it's self-expression, but what's difficult is that if no one ever performs the music, it never gets heard. 

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