

[OPENING  
THE  
CURTAIN](#)

Back to Class

Furious Theater Company transforms the intimate, upstairs theater at the Pasadena Playhouse into a classroom for their production of "Gidion's Knot."

Nov 12, 2013

## FROM THIS EPISODE

This is Anthony Byrnes *Opening the Curtain* on LA theater for KCRW.

When you enter, you're told "take a seat at any desk." Not an office desk, a school desk. You know the ones: chair and desk combined. The fake wood, complete with pencil groove, wraps around to create a support for your writing hand (sorry, lefties). These aren't the tiny desks. They're the

ones you'd get in middle school and they'll take you right back - like a sense memory exercise gone awry.

As you look around, it's almost as jarring. It's all there: familiar grey linoleum floor with white and black spots, homework pinned to the walls, requisite fluorescent light humming from the ceiling, appropriately colorful seasonal poster and homework assignment on the board. You've walked into a fifth grade class room! There's even a teacher, Ms. Clark, sitting at her desk . . . but something's wrong.

This is set designer Aaron Francis' inspired creation for the play [\*Gidion's Knot\*](#). Furious Theater Company has transformed the intimate, upstairs theater at the Pasadena Playhouse into a classroom. We're not there as students, more as a jury to witness, and maybe decide, a question of blame.

Playwright Johnna Adams has chosen the inherently awkward and dramatic parent teacher conference and supercharged it (perhaps a bit too much). *Gidion's Knot* falls into the tradition of the taut two-character, one-act drama. Time is time; place is place. The 80 minutes of the play unfold on the classroom clock. Our teacher is Ms. Clark. Our parent, Corryn, Gideon's mother. The dramatic engine of the piece is built around the revelations of story and character so to share the plot is to spoil the journey.

*Gidion's Knot* is a play I want to like more than I do. It gets so much right. It's topical: swirling around school violence, both real and imagined, the role of teachers, the job of parents, the mystery of childhood. It has that "ripped from the headlines" quality. The performances are intense and charged. The writing is sharp and the character reversals poignant . . . but there's something that's well, just too much. It's as if everyone working a bit too hard.

You can feel it at the play's center. It's that moment in the play. Even without seeing it you'll recognize it. The secret is revealed and there's a lighting cue that's just a little too abrupt. The warm lights shift to a cool blue - just to make sure we get it. Mechanics that should be hidden announce themselves. It's in the writing when a literary allusion goes on a little too long; and in the acting where a brow is a little too furrowed; and in the ending that feels a bit forced. I feel a little like a parent or a teacher who's critical because he sees so much potential. I couldn't help but feel a little less would have been so much more.

Don't let this stop you from seeing this riveting production. There's a lot to love about it. Just forgive the places where it goes a little too far.

*Gidion's Knot* plays at the Pasadena Playhouse's Carrie Hamilton Theater through November 24.

This is Anthony Byrnes *Opening the Curtain* on LA theater for KCRW.

Running time: 80 minutes without an intermission.

---