

Furious Theatre's 'Gidion's Knot' is a gripping return to Pasadena

By Frances Baum Nicholson
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It is completely appropriate that Furious Theatre's return to the Carrie Hamilton Theatre upstairs at the Pasadena Playhouse should come accompanied by a kick in the gut.

Pushing boundaries, observing and decoding confrontation, and always the challenge to think — perhaps even to the point of having to look oneself in the mirror in a different way — is what Furious is about. Most assuredly, the Los Angeles-area premiere of "Gidion's

Knot" by Johnna Adams provides all these things. And at Furious, it provides them up close.

In "Gideon's Knot" perhaps the most complicated kind of "knot" presents itself: Gidion, a 10-year-old boy, has killed himself. His mother shows up at the door of his 5th grade classroom to keep the parent-teacher conference she'd agreed to before the tragedy. There she works to tear up, or apart, the teacher she blames for her boy's death, yet must confront the boy the teacher knew and she did not. In the end, there is fury and also hints at an answer, but it may not be one the mother can handle.

Director Darin Anthony brings his audience intentionally, disquietingly close to the action, as the two women wrestle with each other and with tragedy. They sit in student desks around the edges of Aaron Francis' recreated classroom, where Miss Clark is grading papers. The tears, the anger, the struggle in the midst of emotional upheaval to deconstruct a horrible event, all happen almost within arm's length. This is also the point. This isn't happening somewhere else. It is something shared. Immediate.

Paula Cale has the true aura of an elementary school teacher as Heather Clark: gentle but firm, emotionally connected to the doings in her classroom. Indeed, her character's emotionalism is the weakness this parent-nemesis seeks to use to advantage. Still, she carries an underlying sense of solidity — of being on her home turf — that allows her some balance against the attack.

Vonessa Martin creates the furious, distraught Corryn Fell, Gidion's mother, as a person caught between intellectualism and a need to both vent and blame, even if that emotion is also smokescreen. As she circles the focus of her anger, and strikes at the most vulnerable points, she also allows us a physical sense of the chinks in her own armor.

The two play extraordinarily well off of each other, keeping the tension of this play roaring throughout — but a tension which has the audience in a constant state of reevaluation.

"Gidion's Knot" asks complicated questions, and lays the groundwork for complicated answers. It never talks down to its observers, leaving bits of the knot to be unraveled slowly, just as it must be by the two

women confronting each other in the script. And that is what one expects from this company: excellence, tension, things to think about and a few things left hanging in the air one breathes.

Be aware, even the seating is not particularly about comfort. This play is performed without intermission, which makes complete sense as there is no way one could interrupt the emotional build happening in real time.

To read more reviews by Frances Baum Nicholson, visit her blog: www.stagestruckreview.org

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