

# LOS ANGELES

by Sharon Perlmutter

## *Gidion's Knot*

Furious is back and as furious as ever. Let the people rejoice! Well, the people who love dark, confrontational theatre that takes them for a hell of a ride and leaves them drained afterward—let them rejoice. Furious is back in residence at Pasadena Playhouse's Carrie Hamilton Theatre, and I'm happy to report that the company's temporary absence hasn't dulled its edge. If you're like me, that's about all you'll need to know to go see *Gidion's Knot*, a play which unfolds itself so elegantly, it is really best to go in completely unspoiled.

For those who need a bit more, Johnna Adams's play takes place in real time—a single 90-minute scene played from beginning to end. It's a parent/teacher conference, which is, when you really think about it, a scenario which is already a bit uncomfortable for the participants. After all, the parent (in this case, a mother) is going to be facing a teacher who has concerns about her son's behavior—and it's very likely going to involve some blame for how she's running things at home. The teacher, likewise, doesn't really want to be there either; she's going to be facing someone who will very likely blame her for any failures of teaching which led to problems in her classroom. It's an unpleasant conversation for both participants, in which everyone has to rely on social niceties to keep things from getting ugly.



**Paula Cale Lisbe (background) and Vonessa Martin**

The parent/teacher conference at issue in *Gidion's Knot* is anything but ordinary. It begins uncomfortably because the teacher, Ms. Clark, was not expecting the mother, Ms. Fell, to attend at all. Ms. Clark is immediately thrown off her game when the unknown mother enters, claiming a scheduled conference, as Ms. Clark had nothing in her book. But it is eventually revealed that she *did* have the conference scheduled, but took it out of her book for the very good reason that the student, Gidion, had since died. Ms. Clark believes that the grieving mother certainly has more important things to do than attend the conference; and she also thinks that the purpose for the conference—to confront Ms. Fell about the reasons for Gidion's suspension—no longer exists. But a purpose does exist for Ms. Fell (who wants to be called Corryn). Indeed, the purpose is everything

for Corryn; she is trying to pull together the facts surrounding her young son's last days, and what happened at school is a major piece of the puzzle.

Furious co-founder Vonessa Martin gives a tour de force performance as Corryn, a mother on the edge. Her emotional situation makes Corryn dangerous—occasionally fragile, sometimes brutal, but always unpredictable. Because Corryn is grieving, societal norms require Ms. Clark to cut her some slack, and she does. But this just gives Corryn more power in this struggle, as Corryn will play any advantage she has to get what she wants. And what probably gives Corryn even more of an advantage is that she is willing to speak what is usually unspoken—she'll comment on the conversation itself, in ways that Ms. Clark never will. (Indeed, at one point, I thought the play would take a complete different tack if Ms. Clark would just say, "I don't think we should have this conversation right now." But that's someplace where Ms. Clark simply can't go.) There is a wealth of detail in Martin's performance—watch how she chides Ms. Clark for declining to call her Corryn, but somehow manages to patronize Ms. Fell every time she calls the teacher by her first name.

Pauline Cale Lisbe gives us a Ms. Clark who isn't so out of her depth that she can't give Corryn a fair fight. She's losing from the beginning (you can just tell in their appearances—costume designer Sherry Linnell gives Ms. Clark an unstructured cardigan against Corryn's tailored jacket), but she can take the upper hand when necessary. After all, she is in possession of the facts which Corryn ultimately wants to learn. Lisbe's Clark is stronger than she looks; she can stop Corryn cold when she wants to. But we also know something Corryn doesn't—we've seen her alone in the classroom before Corryn arrived, and Ms. Clark might just be on the edge herself.

There is a mystery to be revealed, and we do, eventually, get to the bottom of what happened to Gidion. But that's not really the point here; these two women are going to walk away from this conference, and the young boy for whom they were both responsible will still be dead. How they will both be affected by that fact is what is, fundamentally, at stake in this intense, taut, brilliant little play.

*Gidion's Knot* runs through November 24 at the Pasadena Playhouse Carrie Hamilton Theatre in Pasadena. For tickets and information, see [www.furioustheatre.org](http://www.furioustheatre.org).

Furious Theatre presents *Gidion's Knot*, by Johnna Adams. Directed by Darin Anthony. Produced by Furious Theatre Company. Stage Manager Alfonso Ramirez; Assistant Director Gabriele Griego; Set Design Aaron Francis; Production Manager Susan K. Coulter; Lighting Design Christie Gilmore; Costume Design Sherry Linnell; Sound Design Sloe Slawinski; Technical Director Adam Critchlow; Marketing Manager Joan Hurwit; House Manager Bobbi L. Scott; Social Media Manager Sofija Dutcher; Graphic Design Eric Pargac; Publicity David Elzer/Demand PR

Cast:

Corryn Fell - Vonessa Martin

Heather Clark - Paula Cale Lisbe

*Photo: Anthony Masters Photography*

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