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Curio Theatre holds its own with 'Eurydice' version

October 17, 2011 | By Wendy Rosenfield, For The Inquirer

It's curious that Curio Theatre wasn't too intimidated by the Wilma Theater's 2008 production of Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* to produce it itself. That earlier version, with its Barrymore-winning original music, sun-bleached set, and stylized direction, set a standard that this small, new-ish, low-budget West Philly company would have a rough time matching.

Even curiouser? Curio's production, under the direction of Liz Carlson, gets at the heart of Ruhl's work, humanizing it, bringing its tragic elements to the fore, and making the Wilma's production seem downright aloof. Part of that warmth may emerge naturally from the play's casting. Curio artistic director Paul Kuhn, who plays dear, departed Father to Tessa Kuhn's *Eurydice*, also happens to be her real-life father. But the younger Kuhn, still in high school, radiates an innocence that renders *Eurydice*'s naive decisions an outgrowth of her lack of experience, rather than those of a mature woman willfully ignoring her instincts.

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Tessa Kuhn has the title role in the Curio Theatre's... (COURTESY OF THE ARTIST)

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Eurydice wanders away from her own wedding to Orpheus (Steve Carpenter), easily led astray by A Nasty Interesting Man (C.J. Keller), or, in Ruhl's own twist on the myth and *Eurydice*'s motivation, impulsively destroys her only chance to leave the underworld, and it makes sense. Girls disappear every day. They get stuck between wanting to grow up fast and remaining daddy's princess. Sometimes they make terrible choices and must spend the rest of their lives (or afterlives) with the consequences. That she may end up the bride of petulant man-child Lord of the Underworld (Keller, again, careening around the set on a tricycle, in this hammy, attention-grabbing turn) is one of those consequences.

Orpheus gets most of the classical glory. While she did not have his musical gifts, *Eurydice* still had the gift of free will, and, Ruhl says, she used it as people often will: recklessly, and against their own best interests. But music still matters in this play, from Paul Kuhn's set, a cochlea-spiraled, two-story wooden boardwalk, to Drew Petersen's eclectic sound design. Petersen's work sends occasionally jarringly anachronistic blasts; Lord of the Underworld's heavy-metal entrances cheapen the dreamy Big Band ambience Petersen and costume designer Aetna Gallagher establish early on, but not enough to destroy the overall effect.

Director Carlson's finest blend of sound and image comes as a chorus of stones (Gallagher, Eric Scotolabi, and Harry Slack) droops and sags while Father slowly builds *Eurydice* an Underworld house of string. Petersen's nostalgic music rings one note at a time; eternity is long, but paternal love, it seems, makes the time pass more gently.

Eurydice

Through Nov. 12, presented by the Curio Theatre Company, 4740 Baltimore Ave. Tickets: \$15, \$20. Information: 215-525-1350 or www.curiotheatre.org

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