

Strong work in “Redwood Curtain” at Bridge Street Theatre

[Amy Durant](#) | Monday, November 6 2017



I'm a fan of Lanford Wilson's work, but had yet to see *Redwood Curtain*, so I was pleased to see that Bridge Street Theatre – one of my favorite not-as-local theaters, and one of my favorite discoveries of the year – was staging it so I'd finally get a chance to see this show I'd heard so much about over the years.

Geri (Juli Pham), a 17-year-old piano prodigy, is in search of her birth parents; she's the daughter of a Vietnamese woman and an American soldier, and as there are scores of vets living off the grid in the redwood forest near her Aunt Geneva's (Molly Parker Myers) California home, she often speaks to them, telling them outrageous lies to see if they can help her in her quest. When she comes across Lyman (Joseph Tisa) she's sure he's different from the rest and is the key to her family mystery, but Lyman proves harder to get answers from than she imagined.

The set (as always at Bridge Street) is gorgeous; a few large, almost fairy-tale-esque trees sculpted by Harry Matthews representing the forest, set pieces that roll in and out for Geneva's home, a coffee shop, a car, and a screen as a backdrop with a projection of the forest to make it extend as far as we can see (cleverly edged with camouflage netting such as soldiers would have used in the war.) Designer – and director – John Sowle has done fine work here.

The actors work well together; Tisa is strong as the broken, almost feral Lyman, with halting speech patterns, a cautious limp and an occasional burst of fury, he's unpredictable yet utterly sympathetic. Myers is layered and believable as Geneva, with her love of the forest in the forefront and her rich-girl upbringing obvious in both her tone and her careful, crisp gait. You'd think this would make her unlikeable but quite the opposite – she's a woman who's taken her money and done good with it, and who loves her family dearly. Pham has ups and downs as Geri; there are times when she's in the moment and we're rooting for her, and there are times when she seems to be slow picking up cues or grasping for her next lines and we're drawn out of the action.

Although overall I did enjoy the show, it seems that Wilson tried to cram too much into one play; the premise itself (Geri searching for her roots) is strong enough, but to throw in an ecology lesson with Geneva losing the forest her family has been taking care of for generations to an unscrupulous company as well as a strange magical component where Geri seems to have powers (which are never quite explained and almost strike me as a bit racist) seems like overkill. Wilson's a stronger writer than this, so I find it a bit perplexing. However, this is no fault of the company or this production; the work here is strong, watchable and worth your time.