

AISLE SAY San Francisco

SONIA FLEW

By Melinda Lopez

Presented by San Jose Repertory Theatre

Directed by Richard Seer

At San Jose Repertory Theatre

101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose, CA / (408) 367-7255

Reviewed by [Judy Richter](#)

One of the adventures of seeing a particular play for the first time is that one might learn something new. That was my experience upon seeing **Melinda Lopez's** 2004 "**Sonia Flew**" at **San Jose Repertory Theatre**. One of the events that it deals with is Operation Pedro Pan, the 22-month period from Dec. 26, 1960, to Oct. 23, 1962, when 14,068 Cuban children were sent to the United States to could escape the repressive Castro regime. This exodus was new to me.

In the fictional plot of "Sonia Flew," the central character, Sonia (**Ivonne Coll**), is one of those children. In Act 1 of the two-act play, she's a middle-aged professional woman in Minneapolis who has a husband, Daniel (**Michael Santo**), and two teenage children, Zak (**Miles Gaston Villanueva**), and Jen (**Tiffany Ellen Solano**), who's younger. It's December 2001, and the family is awaiting a Hannukah/Christmas visit from Daniel's Jewish father, Sam (**Julian López-Morillas**), who lives in Florida. Turmoil erupts when Zak announces that -- motivated by the 9/11 attacks -- he has dropped out of college and enlisted in the military without discussing his decision with anyone in the family beforehand. Sonia is particularly upset, so furious that she tells Zak she'll never forgive him.

Act 2, which takes place in Havana in April 1961, offers insight into Sonia's extreme reaction. Young Sonia (Solano) is 15 and -- although not necessarily caught up in pro-Castro fervor -- is willing to go along with it. Her parents, Pilar (**Kwana Martinez**) and Orfeo (López-Morillas), are far more cautious. Nevertheless, they make a show of going along, especially since they know that their actions are being scrutinized by a family friend, Tito (Santo). Tito has bought into the Castro line and worries what will happen to him if he doesn't do what he's told. Sensing that danger is closing in on their family, Pilar and Orfeo ask their housekeeper, Marta (Coll), to prepare false documents that will allow Sonia to go to the U.S. It's a sudden decision that requires Sonia, who has absolutely no say in the matter, to leave that very evening. Angry and uncomprehending, she renounces her parents.

When the action shifts back to Minneapolis after Zak has been serving in a war zone, Sonia is finally willing to talk about her youthful trauma and to reconcile with him.

Directed by **Richard Seer**, this is an absorbing, thought-provoking production with stellar acting. Coll is especially impressive as she switches from her role as the nearly neurotic adult Sonia to Marta, pale, gaunt and bent with age. Confrontations between various characters are handled well. Perhaps the only shortcoming in the script is that the grandfather's youthful escape from the Nazis in Poland and subsequent U.S. military service are only briefly alluded to. A little more about his experiences might enrich the play. Still, it's a fine production enhanced by **Robin Sanford Roberts'** fluid set design, **Cathleen Edwards'** costumes, **Trevor Norton's** lighting and **Paul Peterson's** sound.