

THE GILROY
DISPATCH

'Sonia Flew': Love, heartbreak and sacrifice

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By [Camille Bounds](#)

The late '50s and early '60s was a volatile time in Cuban history. Fidel Castro and his revolutionary guerrillas overthrew the Batista government, seized power and enforced a Marxist regime, which closed schools, started to control the population and indoctrinate the children. Parents panicked and Operation Pedro Pan was born.

Operation Pedro Pan is a little-known topic, but in 22 months - from Dec. 26, 1960 to Oct. 23, 1962 - 14,048 children with forged documents and without their parents flew from Havana to Miami, Fla. to start new lives in the most political airlift of children in history. Many never saw their parents again.

"Sonia Flew," by playwright Melinda Lopez, shows the effect this situation created for one woman and one family.

The first act takes place in 2001 in Minneapolis and follows Sonia (a superb Ivonne Coll), bright and educated, now married with two college-aged children, realizing the middle-class American dream. She has never revealed to her family how her parents made her leave Havana - never to see them again. She carries the secret with guilt and anger, but never lets the family she adores and protects know her feelings - until her son decides to quit college and join the army. Her world is jarred and she can't come to grips with the thought of the possibility of losing her son to a politically, violence-driven cause.

The second act reveals the story of Sonia's secret and takes us to Havana 1961, which is now a police state where support of the regime is mandatory. Openly disagreeing with the authority means arrest and/or disappearance, and having a short wave radio is a crime.

Pilar (inspiring Kwana Martinez), Sonia's mother, is concerned for her 15-year-old daughter and is determined to convince her husband to agree to get their daughter out of the country. Marta (brilliantly-handled by Ivonne Coll) is an aging friend of the family who assists.

Richard Seer's meticulous direction digs deep into the depth of Sonia and Pilar's feelings and he moves his brilliant cast around their emotions in dual roles.

The entrancing sets by Robin Sanford Roberts are remarkable. The scenery for each act sets the time and sentiment of the moment. Lighting by Trevor Norton creates the mood.

This is a flawless cast that knows their craft and is a joy to watch. "Sonia Flew" is well done theater and a theatre lover's luxury. It will make us think about how fragile our freedoms can become and how precious they are.

'Sonia Flew'

Where: San Jose Repertory Theatre, 101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose

Through: June 6

Details: (408) 367-7255 or visit www.sjrep.com