

The Huntington Flies High with Sonia

By Michael C. Sherrin

For parents and grandparents, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, *Sonia Flew* will make everyone promise to give their loved ones an extra hug before bedtime. A poetic and powerful drama, *Sonia Flew* attempts to bridge the gap between generations, cultures, and ideologies. Sonia, seen as both a mother and as a young girl, sees herself forced to leave Cuba in the dawn of Fidel Castro's rule, and then watches her son leave home to fight in Afghanistan by his own will. This ignites Sonia's family in Cuba and then in the present, providing a timeless glimpse into the emotional struggle of a family that all can identify.

Written by Melinda Lopez and commissioned by the Huntington Theater Company, *Sonia Flew* begins in Minneapolis during Christmas of 2001. A middle-aged Sonia (Carmen Roman) prepares a Sabbath dinner for her Jewish father-in-law on his way from the airport. Her son, Zak (Ivan Quintanilla) plans to tell Sonia about his plans to go into the military, which will hopefully garner his grandfather's blessing. The second act tells of Sonia's past in Cuba and the life that she keeps secret from her husband and children. The actors are double-cast in Havana, Cuba in 1961 and in Sonia's childhood home. The young protagonist (Amelia Alvarez) is the center of a family that hates the Communist regime and worries about the government sending her away for military service.

The contemporary setting of the first act appears timely as well as

timeless. Substitute television for the internet and Vietnam for Afghanistan and the play is suddenly brought back to the 1970's. The silent echo of 9/11 in the play can be compared to the fear of the Soviet Union and the atom bomb. Nonetheless, the strength of *Sonia Flew* can be detected in the broadness of its message. Though the playwright and her subject matter directly relate to the Cuban-American struggle of leaving and possibly never returning home, these issues affect families and individuals of all backgrounds. The issue of one's departure in *Sonia Flew* is about the willingness to return, not the ability.

With an amazingly sweet and poetic script, the actors have a rich time rousing the audience with images of our own holiday battles and parent-child wars. Though the stakes are higher in this drama, the tragedy of loss in *Sonia Flew* shows the need for forgiveness. Its dealings with life and death make that all the more pronounced.

Having a small cast play the roles of corresponding characters in Minneapolis and Cuba shows the strength of the company's actors and is successful at keeping the audience connected to the performers on stage. Further, the double casting certainly helps show off this fine and talented group of actors' range. One of the most notable performances of the evening came from Jeremiah Kissel; his transformation in the first act from Daniel, a mellow father, to the comic relief character of Tito in the second, is a startling and incredible accomplishment.

Yet the emotion of each and every performance reverberates through the many-leveled script.



Carmen Roman delivers an amazing performance as the middle-aged Sonia. Throughout the first act, she treads through a number of poetic soliloquies that adds levels of mystery to her past. Because of Roman's acting depth and Lopez's well-structured script, discovering Sonia's origin becomes a craving for a hungry audience. And while the ending is inferable, the payoff is filled with enough tears to keep the discovery alive.

Sonia Flew will urge you to hug, kiss, or show your love in some way to a person you hold dear. You will

not need a connection to Latin American history nor will you need to have a child going to war. In order to appreciate and enjoy *Sonia Flew*, you will only need the ability to apply loving and losing to that of which most of us take for granted - our family.

Sonia Flew will be playing at The Virginia Wimberly Theater in the Stanford Calderwood Pavillion (527 Tremont Street in Boston) through November 28. For more information call 617-266-0800 or go to www.huntingtontheater.org.

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