

September 20, 2006

Sonia Flew – Our Dreams for our Children ... vs. Their Dreams

By: Joseph Sirota
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A parent's greatest wish is often to provide their child with a better life than they themselves had. Sounds heartwarming, no? But, problems arise when an intensely devoted mother's concept of what's best for their son is drastically different from her equally strong values. When the decision at hand is one that can mean life-or-death, the disagreement, despite best intentions, becomes overwhelming. Such is Sonia's painful dilemma in Melinda Lopez's deeply moving play **Sonia Flew**, brought to vivid life in the Laguna Playhouse's powerful West Coast premiere production.

The captivating play unfolds in reverse chronological order. Opening in December 2001 following the 9/11 Twin Towers attack, we meet Sonia, an upper-middleclass wife and mother busily preparing for a Christmas visit from her husband's father. Any issues seem lighthearted -- getting her traditional lime Jell-O salad done, and urging son (Zak), daughter (Jen) and loving husband (Daniel) to hustle in helping get house and dinner ready, and meeting Grandpa Sam at the airport on time. Even barbed family dialog exchanges are humorous and caring, not weighty. Differentiating this from the poster All-American Family is Sonia's Cuban accent while preparing a traditional Jewish Friday Night Sabbath dinner for the clearly Jewish Grandpa, this too, adding to husband Daniel's loving pride for versatile Sonia. Quickly, the humorous banter is shattered and the, "happy family" mood replaced by a tense battle of wills and priorities. Why? Well, son Zak announces he's decided to "do his part for his under-attack country". He will join the marines this Monday, foregoing the dream higher education path that's his for the taking.

Within minutes, Playwright Lopez's tale swerves to unfolding the resulting shock on each family member and their relationships. What appeared so solid is suddenly rocked to the point of perhaps not surviving this shattering clash of life paths. Sonia's devastated by Zak's wartime marines choice. She angrily vows never to accept or forgive the family's position of leaving Zak's life-risking decision to Zak. She forbids his reckless bravado. I won't reveal what happens.

The post-intermission half of the play strikingly flashes back 40 years. Young Sonia is 15, in her family's graceful Cuban estate home in 1961. Their comfortable lives now teeter on a knife's edge, as all formerly wealthy Cuban families are suspect and bullied under Fidel Castro's new violently nationalistic regime. Creatively, the same six actors now portray the various Cuban characters in young Sonia's world. They, too face a life-or-death decision of survival pitting family unity vs. a child's survival. We see first hand why Sonia is darkly haunted by son Zak's headstrong choice.

Director Juliette Carrillo ably gets the most from the play's poignancy, philosophical issues and humor. Her cast of six, each playing dual 2001/1961 personas provides both

heart and gut-wrenching intensity. Leading the way is Judith Delgado as Sonia the mother, tortured by fears for her child and past memories. She doubles as Marta, the fiery Cuban maid. Delgado wonderfully combines grieving Mom, spitfire freedom-fighter maid and whimsical tropical Cuban replanted in Minnesota. Matt Gottlieb impressively creates two polar opposites as Sonia's lovingly understanding psychologist husband and also Tito, a Castro spy/enforcer pressing young Sonia and parents follow official dictates, under his guise of being a friend. Tanya Perez sparkles as Sonia's outspoken modern daughter Jen and even more so as the young, teenage Sonia, torn by adolescent romance, patriotism and yearning to preserve her Cuban roots and family.

Christian Barillas as son Zak is a convincingly confused yet determined young would-be American patriot, who also portrays Jose, Sonia's first teenage love who shows even greater passion to be a noted young Castro-patriot. Geno Silva plays two paternal roles, creating Zak's strong-minded but caring Grandpa Sam, and also young Sonia's father -- professorial, but ultimately willing to sacrifice to protect his daughter. Finally, Marissa Chibas strongly creates Nina, Zak's modern-day brave colleague, then turns in a truly moving performance as young Sonia's mother who, despite an initial pampered aristocrat, rises to compellingly convey the depth of a mother's unselfish protective spirit.

The production is another handsome effort for the Laguna Theatre. Myung Hee Cho's scenic design impresses, flexibly creating both Cuban and Minnesotan settings, aided by effective lighting by Lonnie Alcaraz. Joyce Kim Lee's costume design spans years and cultures well. Sound design by David Edwards, plus special music composed by Chris Webb, assure we enjoy what we hear and well as see. The result is a high quality, high impact dramatic offering that challenges us movingly. Especially touching was relating the actual "Operation Pedro Pan", (1960-62), when Cuban parents sent over 14,000 children to Miami, unaccompanied, with fake American visas. That's love.

[.Sonia Flew](#) at The Laguna Playhouse, 606 Laguna Canyon Road, Laguna Beach through Oct 15. Showtimes: Tues- Sat eves at 8:pm; Matinees: 2:pm Sat & Sun. Tickets: \$20-\$65.

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