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- ◆ Fun for the whole Family
- ◆ Poignant and empowering
- ◆ Great music and lyrics
- ◆ 1 hour, no intermission



Pedro Pan

Book by Rebecca Aparicio, Music and Lyrics by Stephen Anthony Elkins
Directed by Rebecca Aparicio
Part of the 2015 New York International Fringe Festival
(<http://www.fringenyc.org>)

Off Off Broadway, Musical
Runs through 8.28.15
VENUE #7: The Theater at the 14th Street Y, 344 East 14th Street

by Antonio Minino on 8.18.15



Luis E. Mora in *Pedro Pan*. Photo by Corey Wilson.

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BOTTOM LINE: Watch out Gloria Estefan, there is another Cuban American musical in town and it is oh so good.

The New York International Fringe Festival does not kid when it says “Moments Made Here.” They must have picked their slogan after including *Pedro Pan* as part of this year’s line-up. *Pedro Pan* is a new lively and sincere musical for the whole family that will fly by and leave you wanting more. This is not another adaptation of J.M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy*, although it does take some inspiration from it. Book writer Rebecca Aparicio is instead writing about Operation Pedro Pan, and what it feels like to be a “lost boy” (or girl) in the great big U.S. of A.

In the 1960s over 14,000 children left Cuba without their parents, stripped from ever returning to their homes. This was known as Operation Pedro Pan, one of the largest recorded exoduses of unaccompanied minors. The reason was simple yet alarming: their parents feared indoctrination by the government, brainwashing them into being Children of the Revolution at the impressionable age of 13.

When Pedro (played with melt-your-heart charm and powerful vocals by Luis E. Mora) returns from school one day and tells his parents (Bobby Gámez and Aparicio) that he learned how great Fidel Castro is, they know it is time to send him to live with his Tía Lily (a flawless and spirited Amanda Castaños) in New York. In the bitter sweet number “Fly” he embarks on a world of new opportunities and firmly believes his parents will soon follow. Sadly this is never the case.

Not only does Pedro have to adapt to a new culture without his parents, but after being bullied on his first day of school, he realizes that he must learn to speak English too—and quick. He meets Rogelio, an immigrant from Mexico, and in the number “We Won’t Stand Out” he informs Pedro that the only way to survive is by hiding where you are from, and so Rogelio and Pedro become Roger and Peter.

However, it is not only the immigrant characters who feel displaced in America. Wendy (played to perfection by Destinee Rea), a stunning girl from Alabama whose family moved to New York to avoid being persecuted for the color of their skin, feels like a stranger in her own country. Her anthem is very different from that of Roger, and she teaches Pedro that we are all "Beautiful" in one of the tear-jerking numbers of the night.

Pedro Pan is able to entertain and educate young audiences, and prove the universality of an issue that many believe only affects certain communities. Aparicio could easily go further and expand her book by spending more time in Cuba, and by deepening the hardships of the immigrant and African American experience in the '60s. The character of the Bully (John Ryan Del Bosque) comes to mind as one of the places where she can grow these ideas. This would push what is a lovely family show into the realm of greatness.

The harmonic blend of Cuban rhythms and musical theatre styles in the music and lyrics by Stephen Anthony Elkins are deliciously on point and will keep your feet tapping, when not tugging at your heartstrings.

Rachel Dozier-Ezell's costumes transport us to old Havana and the New York of the '60s with ease; her use of textures and color is exquisite. Guillermo Laporta knows how to design for a festival. His minimal set and outstanding projections help us fly over the Atlantic, visit a brownstone, and play catch in a schoolyard, without interrupting the action with unnecessary or extensive transitions. The only furniture that moves in and out of the stage are two chairs, and Aparicio brilliantly uses the aid of Pedro's parents to do so, keeping them ever-present while forever an ocean away from their son.

There's no reason why we should not see the words *Pedro Pan* light up a Broadway marquee in the near future. As Pedro himself says: "This is where my story begins."

(*Pedro Pan* plays at VENUE #7: The Theater at the 14th Street Y, 344 East 14th Street, through August 28, 2015. Performances are Sun 8/16 at 3:45; Wed 8/19 at 2; Sat 8/22 at 1:45; Tue 8/25 at 2; and Fri 8/28 at 2. **There is no late seating at FringeNYC.** Tickets are \$18 and are available at **fringenyc.org** (http://www.fringenyc.org/basic_page.php?ltr=P). For more information visit www.pedropanthemusical.com (<http://www.pedropanthemusical.com>).