

FRONT and CENTER

BOSTON



Playwright
Melinda Lopez

Cuban Currents

CUBAN-AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT/ performer Melinda Lopez may have grown up in the chill winds of New England snow and Yankee stoicism, but every so often the warm breezes of her parents' native country blew through her life. She vividly recalls family events and vacations with "loud, dark dancing people, beautiful and so lively."

"I was really in love with them," Lopez adds. "My aunts would dress up in their wigs, and my mother would smoke and drink big goblets of wine, and they'd throw each other in the pool. It was raucous, and we'd roast a pig. Family events were like theatre." That Cuban imprint was strengthened at home, where the family spoke Spanish, and Cuban food and decor complemented stories of "this other life that

couldn't have been more different."

Lopez, the first recipient in 1999 of the **Kennedy Center's** Charlotte Woolard Award for promising new voices in American theatre, has woven that theme of the immigrant's double life into many of her best works, which include *Midnight Sandwich*, *God Smells Like a Roast Pig* and *The Order of Things*. It's at the heart of her new play *Sonia Flew*, which was partly inspired by meeting a cousin who was one of more than 14,000 "Pedro Pan" children smuggled out of Castro's Cuba after parental rights were threatened. *Sonia Flew* premieres this month (through Nov. 28) at Boston's **Huntington Theatre Company**. Directed by Nicholas Martin, the play christens the new Virginia Wimberly Theatre at Boston Center for the Arts.

Sonia Flew begins with the present-

day family crisis caused when Sonia's son enlists in the Marines because he hopes to "give back" for his privileged life in America. For Sonia this prompts memories of how a long-ago war tore her young life apart—the second act flashes back to 1961 Havana on the day it is decided 15-year-old Sonia will be sent out of danger, but against her will, to America, leaving her parents behind.

Sonia Flew enters sociopolitical realms that resonate strongly in today's uncertain times. Yet the play is also movingly personal, touching on universal emotions: love, loss, betrayal, forgiveness, sacrifice, honor. Lopez says: "I kept coming up with, 'What would it take for me to give up a child? What were the parents thinking? What was the child thinking?' Of course, we all have to give up our kids as they grow, so it's a familiar, normal, healthy occurrence. But in some cases, it's also catastrophic."

—Karen Campbell

NEW YORK CITY

Rosebud Was a Sled

TWO OF THE BEST PLAYS FROM THE 2004 **Edinburgh Fringe Festival** come to New York this month, Nov. 5–9, for an Off-Broadway run at the **Michael Schimmel Theater at Pace University**.

Rosebud: The Lives of Orson Welles, by Mark Jenkins, and *Sisters, Such Devoted Sisters*, by Russell Barr, won the Carol Tambor Award, launched this year to give New York a taste of Edinburgh's arts fest, billed as the largest in the world.

"Over the years I've seen so many great works at the Edinburgh Festival that never came to New York," says Tambor, "so I decided to facilitate bringing at least one of the works here."

Sisters, a comic one-man show about the coming-of-age of a drag queen, took second place. The first-place winner, *Rosebud*, tours the mind and career of one of film's greatest innovators, a man who couldn't get funding for his cinematic visions, despite the critical success of his first feature *Citizen Kane*. "He was viewed as a threat," says playwright Jenkins. "The government and FBI stalked him."

With the audacity of youth (an audacity Welles never outgrew), the 24-year-old wunderkind took on newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst in *Citizen Kane*. Hearst, who once said he didn't go into movies himself "because you can crush a man with journalism, and you can't with motion pic-



OSWALD IMAGES

Christian McKay in
*Rosebud: The Lives of
Orson Welles*.

tures," tried to kill the film at the box office, launching a national smear campaign in his newspapers and on his radio stations. To fund his projects in the face of such opposition, Welles starred in other people's films, did voiceovers, narrated documentaries, made commercials. "He sold steaks, hot dogs, frozen peas, but he never sold out," says director Josh Richards. "He never made a Faustian pact. In the play, Welles says, 'I picked a fight with Lucifer very early on; as a career move it wasn't very smart. For sure as hell, the devil runs the show.'"

Welles is played by newcomer Christian McKay, a 30-year-old member of the Royal Shakespeare Company who could have doubled for the actor/director in *The Lady from Shanghai*, made when Welles was 32. McKay captures the star's mannerisms with an easy naturalism: the jutting lower lip, the wry grin that seems poised between a smirk and a smile, the brazen self-confidence and Napoleonic temper. But his performance doesn't feel like an impersonation.

"In the beginning I warned Christian, 'Don't impersonate,'" says Richards. "The truth you can find as an actor is in yourself. When you find it, then it will be every man's truth."

—Jesse Wilder