

Pera Palas - A Pearl in Theater's Crown

A glorious theater experience that will leave you wanting more.

By Leyla Gulen

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Through the doors of an Istanbul hotel lie the intersection of time and fate. So seamless is this interaction in the West Coast premier of Sinan Unel's "Pera Palas."

Set at the famed 114 year old metropolitan hotel, a crossroads unto itself, Unel masterfully weaves a web of three separate story lines set in three different time periods, 1918 to 1924, 1952 to 1953 and 1994.

All 10 actors playing 27 characters, with their unique connection to the hotel and not wholly disconnected from each other, brilliantly brought to life what is joyfully complex and utterly logical all at the same time.

It's as if Unel took hold of the sky, earth and sea and braided them together into one singular being while delicately maintaining each strand as independent.

The most independent tress, on many levels, begins in 1918 and centers around a British journalist (Gigi Bermingham) who has come to Turkey to document her travels. She meets a young Turkish girl (Rebecca Mozo), the daughter of a wealthy Pasha, who invites her to stay at the Pasha's harem.

The no-nonsense journalist, while impressed with a life of little ambition and nothing more to worry about than a stroll through private gardens, is gobbsmacked by the bliss of ignorance and the inequality of the female race in Turkey.

Both Bermingham and Mozo make such a convincing pair that one can only feel disappointment at the heartache resulting from the strained relationship that awaits them in the future.

Mozo plays a splendid Turkish girl with boundless energy and a well-attempted accent, not to mention quite authentic in her Turkish utterances except for one huge discrepancy when she called her father 'papa' and not 'baba.'

Mozo exudes the subservient nature of a girl devoted to Turkish tradition and societal norm without waiver. Bermingham, embodies a self-secure British woman caught in the midst of using her own freedom while impressing upon her fellow female to shed the scarf and be seen by the world.

The same theme of independence plays out in 1994 in the lives of two male lovers, one American (Daniel Blinkoff) and one Turkish (Daniel Bess), who find themselves unable to announce their union to blood ties in a country, in so many ways, steeped in tradition yet