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'Tango' puts sexual pathology in motion

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Dance Writer

Feeling a little tango-ed out lately? Who wouldn't, what with tango ballets now lodged in every dance company's repertory and the smash success of *Tango Argentino* in 1986? Well, there's one more twirl around the floor left in this grande dame of social dances.

The latest in the genre, *Forever Tango*, opened Wednesday night at Palm Beach's Royal Poinciana Playhouse, rather like a stunningly stylish latecomer to a waning party, determined to inject new life into the satiated celebrants.

And it does, brilliantly, through breathtakingly torrid dancing that doesn't stoop to romantic cliches, but rather presents the tango as a paean to the pathology of love and sex.

With its 11-member orchestra, 14 dancers and one crooner, *Forever Tango* is less a dance concert than a metaphorical ode to a bygone dance, and not incidentally, its music. Like other revues that purport to educate their audiences about a dance style — such as *Riverdance* and *Bring in da Noise, Bring in da Funk* — *Forever Tango* attempts to put the tango in its historical and social context. Generous, if somewhat florid, program notes provide helpful background, including an explanation of the dance's European and even African roots.

It is this framing concept that elevates *Forever Tango* above its predecessor, *Tango Argentino*. Director Luis Bravo wisely wrings as much variety and theatrical flourish from the genre as possible, swathing it in sweaty glamour, and showing how it progressed from dirty dancing in Buenos Aires brothels to a sanitized social dance in Parisian salons.

After a metaphorical prelude, in which a dancer emerges from a giant bandoneon (the tango's signature accordionlike instrument), we are taken to a 19th century barrio brothel, where two compadritos fight over a

DANCE REVIEW

Forever Tango

Through Feb. 23 at Royal Poinciana Playhouse, 70 Royal Poinciana Plaza, Palm Beach. Shows 8 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 5 and 9 p.m. Saturday, 7 p.m. Sunday. Tickets \$29.50-\$45. Call Ticketmaster, 561-966-3309, 954-523-3309, 305-358-5885.

prostitute. The tango here is colored with machismo and cold sexuality with an edge of misogyny.

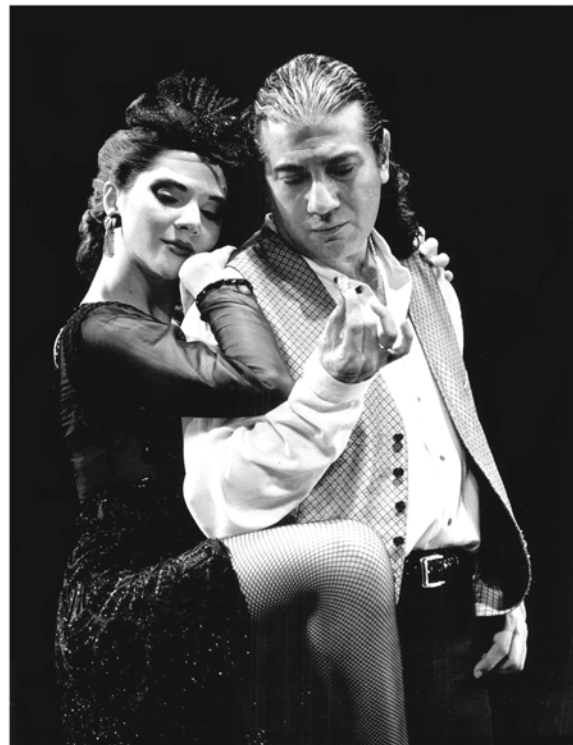
The segments then trace the tango's secret acceptance and its appropriation by the pretentious Buenos Aires middle class. The styles of dancing, likewise, progress from blatantly sexual to increasingly refined, ending with a comical exaggeration.

Bravo is also successful in forcing his audience to find wonderful variety in the tango's quicksilver details. In *azabache*, a tango precursor of African origin, the dancing is more rhythmically rounded. In *tanguera* from the '50s, it is the woman, not the man, who flaunts her machisma. And in *libertango*, the dance as sexual conquest transcends the usual cliches.

The richness is enhanced by the dancers, who immediately establish their different personalities, from the fiery athletic prowess of Jorge Torres and Karino Piazza to the cool, razor-slashing movements of Carlos Merlo and Cecilia Saia.

But the tango is nothing without its musical heart. The orchestra, featuring a top-notch string section and pianist plus a bandoneon quartet, is as compelling as the dancers. The bandoneon players wrest astonishing music from what is usually a limited instrument, simulating everything from intricate jazz riffs to Bach organ fugues.

Adios Nonino, by master tango composer Astor



Dancer Veronica Gardella and Luis Bravo, *Forever Tango*'s creator and director, during a rehearsal for the show.

Piazzola, is turned into a hauntingly beautiful lament, and even familiar "tango tunes" like *Jealousy* and *Lo Que Vendra* take on new life.

Tango Forever is a grand seduction, not to be missed. Surrender... it's worth it.