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'Forever Tango' is subtle, yet sizzling

By MISHA BERSON
Seattle Times theater critic

The agile man in the slicked-back hair and natty suit, and the glamorous woman in the slinky black sheath and high, high heels clutch each other tight, lock eyes, and launch into a torridly elegant mating dance.

They're doing a tango. And they mean business.

So how about taking in two hours of undiluted, 100-proof tango at a single sitting?

The sizzling spectacle "Forever Tango" makes that a *my* intoxicating and highly advisable proposition.

This touring display of Argentina's most popular cultural export, the tango, has been making audiences rise up and cheer since 1990. Now finally Seattle gets a chance to swoon, as the show turns the Moore Theatre into a classy tango palace for the next three weeks.

Spending an evening with sleek, agile men who have that molten Antonio Banderas look, and statuesque women with the physiques of Las Vegas showgirls and the fire of flamenco queens, is no great hardship.

Devised, choreographed and keenly lit by Argentine showman Luis Bravo, the show could not be more basic and direct in its appeal. Seven extremely attractive and sup-

ple Argentine dance couples perform a series of electrifying tangos, with intermittent musical interludes by a 11-piece tango orchestra and a fervent balladeer, Alfredo Saez.

What astonishes, however, is not just the sultry heat Bravo's sensuous exhibition generates. That's a given with authentic tango, an unabashedly carnal dance craze which took root in the bordellos and cafes of Buenos Aires a century ago, infiltrated ballroom and show hoofing internationally, and remains hot stuff today.

"Forever Tango" goes beyond the obvious, though, to offer more subtle variations and nuances on the genre than the uninitiated might expect.

As performed by the magnificent troupe of fellow Argentines Bravo assembled, the tango can be teasing or menacing, playful or smoldering, a battle royal, romance or dangerous game. Sexuality is just as variable — and Argentina's famously complex and mercurial national character.

All the dances in "Forever Tango" share a common movement vocabulary: close embraces and smooth caresses, angular arches and dragging lunges, lightning shimmies and spins, and some impressively acrobatic

Tango

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lifts and throws. There are also enough cheek-to-cheek and forehead-to-forehead moments to satisfy tango traditionalists.

The classic tango footwork amazes here, too, especially the short, knife-like forward and back kicks, often executed on a pivot.

Moody, soulful, rhythmically emphatic, and derived from several cultures, the show's tango score dwells on the pungent sound of the bandoneon, an Argentine cousin of the accordion. Lisandro Adrover, the production's arranger-conductor, plays the instrument to perfection — he's the Eric Clapton of the bandoneon. The addition of three more bandoneons, plus strings, piano and flute results in a rapturous sonic mix on tunes by the late Astor Piazzolla and other major tango composers.

It takes a bit for the show's expert dance teams to establish their separate personalities, but they do. Miriam Larici and Fabio Narvaez open the show with a dynamic fantasy sequence and close it by integrating impressive gymnastic lifts and throws into more traditional tango moves.

The sleek young Sandra and Gabriel (who also appear in the film "Evita") share potent chemistry in their duets to "La Cumparsita" and Piazzolla's "Libertango," while the December-May pairing of Carlos Gavito and Marcela Duran ignites some sparks, too.

Another debonaire old smoothie, Hector Mayoral, teams up vivaciously with Elsa Maria. And Marcelo and Veronica clown in the diverting guises of a *compadrito* (cocksure bully) and a cheerful flirt.

Women are supposedly the more subservient partner in the tango, but you would not surmise that from "Forever Tango," which is equal-opportunity sexy and strong. And though the men's angled fedoras, silk scarves and dark suits look suave all right, the costumes Argemira Alfonso concocted for the ladies really grab the eye. Black or silver, low cut or artfully draped, spangled or satiny, they aren't worn so much as spray-painted on.

PLEASE SEE *Tango* ON E 2