

The Star-Ledger

REVIEW

Forever in love with the tango

DANCE

Forever Tango

Where: Shubert Theatre, 225 W. 44th St., New York
When: 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, with matinees at 2 p.m. Wednesday and Saturday and at 3 p.m. Sunday
How much: Tickets are \$45-\$85. Call (212) 239-6200, or visit www.telecharge.com

BY ROBERT JOHNSON
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

NEW YORK — Forever is a long time, but not too long to love someone or to remain enthralled with the tango. Argentina's seductive national dance has made audiences here swoon for nearly 20 years.

"Forever Tango," a passionate ballroom revue created and directed by Luis Bravo, opened a return engagement last week, receiving an enthusiastic welcome Saturday from the matinee crowd at the Shubert Theatre. In this show, the tango remains as sexy as ever, pomaded and glittering. Its appeal eternally youthful.

Some numbers are the same as those performed when "Forever Tango" appeared on Broadway in 1997-98. Aficionados may remember the framework for the show, a poetic conceit in which a man and a woman emerge from an enormous "bandoneón," the accordion that provides the dance's characteristic accompaniment.

"Forever Tango" also has retained its bordello fantasy "En El Suburbio," in which a houseful of tootsies in sequins and feathers, all voluptuous curves, dance with their proud but desperately lonely clients. Complete with an episode in which one woman bends down submissively to shine the boss' shoes, "En El Suburbio" provides a vicarious thrill for the little guy who secretly dreams of being serenaded with a rendition of "Happy Birthday, Mr. President."

Other numbers are new, including the wonderfully comic "La Tablada." With his coxcomb hairdo and rubbery limbs, Marcelo Bernadaz resembles Jim Carrey, dancing cheek to jowl — or cheek to bosom — with Verónica Gardella, who seems fascinated by the shiny silver piece Bernadaz tosses.

Only three dancers remain from the 1997-98 cast, while a new musical director, Victor Lavallén, leads a polished 11-member orchestra and provides backup for tango crooner Miguel Velázquez, who interprets the mournful lyrics to "Los Mareados" ("If I still had the heart I lost . . ." etc.) and the more optimistic "El Día Que Me Quieras."



Natalia Hills leans into Francisco Mercado. The duo teamed up for two tangos, "Derecho Viejo" and "La Cumparsita."

"Forever Tango" may have fewer narrative vignettes than other tango programs, but the dancing itself contains all the drama anyone might want.

This sex-obsessed dance speaks for itself in intimate duets, where delicate caresses alternate with sudden lunges expressing the imperative of desire. The women depend entirely on their partners and demonstrate a hundred techniques for surrender. Sometimes they lean against the men at a dangerous tilt, or reach out with one heeled shoe to search for secure footing. With their quick and intricate legwork, the dancers suggest the mystery and complexity of romantic entanglements.

The tango wouldn't be the tango if it weren't occasionally louche, yet these dancers exhibit exceptional finesse, with



Marcela Duran sways to the music of "A Evaristo Carriego" as Jorge Torres lends his support.

the couples performing in contrasting styles. Laura Marcarie looks wonderfully natural in "La Mariposa," extending the movement impulse in long-limbed gestures while subtly partnered by Carlos Vera. Terrifically musical, Melina Brufman shines in "Comme Il Faut," a more aerodynamic partnership with Claudio González.

After an evening of steamy encounters, "Forever Tango" will leave you panting for more.