

Wango tango

They're dancing sexy in a parallel gay universe

Story by Kyla Wazana

Tango gets people hot. It combines serious dancing with barely restrained lust, as though sex and courtship were the most solemn matters imaginable.

Sex and style chafing against social norms. Ring any bells? Like most fabulous art forms, Forever Tango, with a four-week run at the Winter Garden (through to Sun, Nov 24), keeps its gay history buried.

It's the same old story. Five years ago, it was voguing, created by black gay men.

Forever Tango is the sultry dance sensation from Argentina on a successful North American tour. According to the hyperbolic press kit, "The tango's choreography physicalized the licentious vertical ecstasy of copulation while defying the excruciating pain of needing the opposite sex." The obvious question is: If it hurts so much, why do it?

Luiz Bravo, the show's creator and director, discusses the roots of tango in turn-of-the-century Argentina,

where at one time, men outnumbered women 100 to one. But while he is happy to talk about the homoerotic origins, his perspective is, as he puts it, "very Freudiano."

Tango culture, says Bravo, "was a result of immigration to Argentina which was mostly men.

Out of loneliness, these men met in the bordellos to socialize, play cards, gamble and dance. A lot of homosexual relationships grew out of loneliness.

"Tango is always machista," says Bravo. "The man is so insecure he has to fight for power with other men. The *compadre* would go to the bordello and not sleep with the women so as not to be trapped.

"In the music of the 1940s, the woman was sin because she would take him from his mother, who was God. This is a homosexual sign."

Tango teacher and historian Daniel Trenner agrees that there is an all-male history to tango.



OH GOD.
Machista, mom
and Freud join
Miriam Larici and
Fabio Narvaez as
they tango.

But Trenner, who teaches dance in Maine and runs tango tours to Argentina every year, fills in more of the gay history.

"There is an unspoken gay male latin history," says Trenner. "There are whisperings of all-male tango in the

golden years, when there were more men than women. Only a very few of the older dancers will speak of it.

Apparently there were gay bars in the 1940s and '50s where men excelled in the following part when dancing the tango. Serious dancers, called *milongueros*, liked to go to gay bars because it was important to their tango.

According to some older *milongueros* Trenner has spoken with, the rigid gender codes of heterosexual society were replicated in the gay bars. "Men would fight over their male followers. There were very strict codes so as not to lose face. Men could only dance with certain men."

But will Toronto get to see these dances any time soon? Not.

According to Bravo, the only dance in the show where men dance together is staged as a knife fight over a female prostitute.

"Somewhere within the contractions and expansions of the tango are the contractions and expansions of the universe," says the press kit.

I guess it's a parallel universe, not ours.



Forever Tango.
\$19.50-\$59.50.
Various times.
Thu, Oct 24-Nov 24.
Winter Garden Theatre.
189 Yonge St.
(416) 872-5555.