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At last, Tango in Stafford

FILLED WITH SENSUAL ENERGY
AND EMOTION, *FOREVER TANGO*
IS THE STORY OF THE DANCE
AND PEOPLE OF ARGENTINA

HOUSTON★CHRONICLE

Embracing Tango

Luis Bravo's popular show employs the language of dance to tell its story



FOREVER TANGO PHOTOS

HISTORY OF DANCE: Dancers Alejandra Gutty and Juan Paulo Horvath perform in Forever Tango. The show traces the history of tango through music, dance and dramatic vignettes.

By Eileen McClelland | FOR THE CHRONICLE

In Luis Bravo's experience it takes three to tango.

In the dance extravaganza *Forever Tango*, Bravo is an integral part of each couple's performance. And he invites the audience to share in what is usually considered a private conversation, or a form of seduction. • He isn't a voyeur. Bravo's role as producer and director is to seamlessly join each pair of dancers with the stories he subtly weaves between the dance steps. The performance is created in the dialogue between dancers and director, he says.

Not to mention the additional collaboration among dancers, director and the 11-piece onstage orchestra.

In one way, it's the opposite of making a film, Bravo says.

"In a film, you start from the story and then you add the humanity of the actors, and you fill up the atmosphere with music," Bravo says. "Here I start with the music, and let the music inspire the dance, the stories and everything else."

Bravo is trained not as a dancer but as a cellist. He had an international solo career before he moved on to produce the 1997 Broadway show that has been a hit since its 1994 debut in San Francisco. *Forever Tango* features 14 dancers, one vocalist and an orchestra, including the accordionlike bandoneón, which gives tango music its distinctive sound. The dances are performed to original and traditional music.

The show, which traces the history of tango through music, dance and dramatic vignettes,



FOLLOWING HIS PASSION: Creator Luis Bravo was not trained as a dancer but as a cellist.

Tango by the numbers

2: Number of people it takes to tango

11: Members of *Forever Tango's* onstage orchestra

5 million: Number of people who have seen *Forever Tango*

3: Number of minutes it takes to tango

4: Age at which creator Luis Bravo began playing guitar

14: Number of dancers in *Forever Tango*

1: Number of vocalists in the show

has been seen by more than 5 million people on five continents, including recent sold-out engagements in Japan, Italy, Mexico and Miami.

The bandoneón's unmistakable wailing sound is the tango's distinctive, dissonant signature. "It was a German instrument created in the marching bands, but it sounds so different in the tango," Bravo says. "The instrument and the emotion are the secrets of the show."

To Bravo, tango is a universal language. When a tango performance is on target, a lifetime of emotion can be suggested with the lift of an eyebrow. Loss and loneliness conveyed in a lingering look.

"The tango is a story that you tell in three minutes," Bravo says. "There's no script, but still you can see so many different story lines."

Like Argentina's history itself,

he says. "We're always inventing new stuff. The only way to keep it fresh is just loving what you're doing. And the performers love what they are doing. They are very professional, and they deliver themselves to the audience 100 percent every night. I am so proud of that."

"It's a privilege to be able to work with people who are always giving you something else, who are willing to grow and go higher and higher."

Birth of tango

Argentinian tango was born in the late 19th century at a time when immigrants from all over the world were creating a cul-

tural convergence in Buenos Aires. It is a synthesis of influences from Europe as well as Africa, Cuba and South America, truly a dance of the world that found its full expression in Buenos Aires. Because of its seedy origins, it was at first rejected by the Argentinian upper class as less than respectable. But by the early 20th century the world had discovered and embraced tango, which became a dance craze in New York and Paris and became well respected finally at home.

Argentinians continued to nurture the dance form at home, particularly through the country's golden age of the 1930s and into the 1940s, when Argentina became isolated during

World War II and went through a period of introspection, Bravo says. "We were forced to create our own music, art, customs," he says.

Social changes of the '50s and '60s also are reflected in the show's choreographed timeline. Tango's lyrics began to oppose political repression and led to a ban, forcing it underground at the same time that rock 'n' roll knocked it out of the popular spotlight.

Tango's revival

It was revived in a big way in the 1980s by a series of popular international shows, including

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INTO THEIR WORK: Jorge Torres and Marcela Duran give their all during a performance. *Forever Tango* features 14 dancers, one vocalist and an orchestra.

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Tango Argentino in Paris. *Forever Tango* strives to preserve traditional tango while also building on that tradition. The tango is now an integral part of Argentina's identity.

"It's our culture," Bravo says. "Even with the big integration of societies that we have in the world, I can recognize an Argentinian from 100 miles away, the way they walk, talk, watch other people. It's our culture, and like that of the gypsies or the flamenco people from Spain, you see it, you sense it, you feel it."

And the art form continues to be kept vibrant and vital by innovators in the dance world.

"When I go to Argentina for auditions, it's unbelievable," Bravo says. "I learn so much from watching very young people who are fantastic dancers, trained in classical ballet and modern techniques and capable of doing almost anything they want."

But innovation doesn't change the dance's intent. It begins and ends with feeling.

"I think at the end of the show when people go back home they don't remember the steps or the technique," Bravo says. "They remember the emotions and recognize the dancers by the way they pass the information to the audience. It's like having a conversation with somebody. Everything is important. The way they move their shoulder or hand, the way they watch each other or don't watch each other. You have to be very careful and sensitive to this because that's what people take home when they leave the show."

FOREVER TANGO
2 AND 8 P.M. TODAY AND SATURDAY;
AND 8 P.M. FRIDAY
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TICKETS ARE \$40 TO \$65
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