

Torrid tango spectacular a sensual celebration of life

Forever Tango 872-5555

Created, directed and choreographed by Luis Bravo. Musical direction by Lisandro Adrover. A Follows Latimer presentation until Nov. 24 at the Winter Garden Theatre, 189 Yonge St.

By GEOFF CHAPMAN
DRAMA CRITIC

It's not quite line dance, square dance, regular ballroom dance, the Gay Gordons or even a Sir Roger de Coverley.

It's definitely not folkloric flourishes from the Lin Piao Tractor Assembly Plant (Rotor-Grinding Division) Cultural Awareness Group.

It's tango with a capital T as in Tease, as in Titillation, as in Torrid — and also as in Tremendous and Terrific.

Forever Tango, the all-Argentinian show making a Winter Garden Theatre stopover before eventually heading to Broadway, is a stylized, dramatic delight constructed by 14 dancers, a singer and 11 musicians, all performing as if their future lives depended on their energy, athleticism, precision techniques and sultry sexiness.

The show traces the exotic path of this erotic dance form

from the barrios and bordellos of Buenos Aires via Parisian salons to its contemporary striking, almost soft-core porn form, which produced yelps of approval from the yuppies of Yonge St. on opening night.

The not-so-elusive nature of tango has been well captured by earlier scribes. It has been memorably described as "the vertical expression of a horizontal desire," the present touring show as "sex thinly disguised as choreography."

But this macho male posturing and flighty female response is part of a dazzling musical and historical tradition with antecedents in folk themes, native Indian sound, Afro-Cuban rhythms and emphatic pulses from the Iberian peninsula.

The near-carnal cavorting is far from distasteful. Its sensual secret is that the sexual content is symbolic, the expression of mostly-unfulfilled passion in a series of manoeuvres and rituals so seemingly dangerous to the perpetrators that regulation-happy Canadian authorities would issue a hard-hat warning in a trice.

With this voluptuous display by seven pairs of dancers, the men with hair apparently slicked down with leftovers

from the wrecked Exxon Valdez (and also striking a notable blow against the wretched cult of youth-above-all), the women with elastic frames and haughty glares dangerous to the imagination, you can believe the notion that this deadly-serious caper is the artistic depiction of sex and death — and thus life.

A very thrilling depiction too, carried out with intoxicating speed, brio and timing, which made inevitable Standing Os.

As the dancers gyrated with increasing intensity in their set-pieces, they were matched by enthusiastic, versatile musicians whose line-up featured five strings and four bandoneons — the big Argentinian version of the accordion (imported from Germany a century and more ago) — which has greater range, depth and textured sound and is appropriate for haunting, emotional themes.

These instruments were deftly handled, especially by Lisandro Adrover (also show musical director) with the five string players not far behind, though the emotive impact of the singing in Spanish by Carlos Morel tended to be lost on a mostly unilingual house.

The two pieces best-known to gringo ears — "La Cumparsita"

(danced by three couples) and "Jealousy" — were executed with panache, but there was a plethora of other gems to bedazzle, including tunes by master composer Astor Piazzolla.

For me, the opening and closing pieces dreamed up by creator Luis Bravo and featuring the steamiest couple, Fabio Narvaez and Miriam Larici, enticed the most, just ahead of the double-header eternal male fantasy "S.V.P"/"A Evaristo Carriego" about an older man and younger woman, brilliantly executed by Carlos Gavito and Marcela Duran. It's unfair to single out protagonists but Luis Castro and Claudia Mendoza more than once found great humor in their pieces while Cecilia Saia and Guillermo Merlo were attractively robust and libidinous.

Some may think this is the X-rated dance-manual equivalent of the joy of sex. That's one narrow viewpoint of a show hampered only by the rigidly-replicated abrupt blackouts milliseconds after each climax of around 20 ecstatic one-on-one dance skirmishes and a relatively-weak finale.

It's far more — a striking spectacle that should accelerate global warming trends.



MICHAEL STUPARYK / TORONTO STAR

BROADWAY BOUND: Cecilia Saia and Guillermo Merlo turn in a robust and libidinous performance as part of *Forever Tango's* 14-dancer troupe.