



# THE SUNDAY TIMES

## Feet of endurance

**C**urtain-up on a starry sky to the syncopated rhythms, the breathy, yearning tones of the bandoneon (accordion). Women in stilettos and artfully slashed come-hither dresses; slick-haired macho men in suave suits. Not so much guys and dolls as mafia and molls: the tango is back in town.

Luis Bravo's ebullient show *Forever Tango* opened at the Strand Theatre in London on Tuesday, a few doors away from the Aldwych, where its predecessor, *Tango Argentino* (different producers but a similar format), enjoyed a big success four years ago. I was pleased to see again, among the seven speciality-couples, a senior pair of tango stars from last time around, Mayoral and Elsa Maria, who have been dancing together for nearly 30 years. Slight age has in no way withered their style and panache; they foot-hook and interleg-lock as tirelessly and brilliantly as younger colleagues, with an extra edge of wit. When Mayoral, after a strenuous evening, mops his brow with an immaculate handkerchief before the inevitable encore to the show's finale, it could well be part of the act.

Two singers punctuate the band and dance slots, with numbers that might be reverberantly meaningful if one savvied the lingo (Carlos Morrel particularly favours the *con belto*

style). The on-stage band are terrific, with wonderful cascades on piano from Fernando Marzan in the piece titled *Adios Nonino*, and a full-ensemble, palm-court treatment of the best-known musical item in the programme, *Jealousy*. But leading the quartet of bandoneon players, the show's musical director, Lisandro Adrova, hogs attention by bizarre hair-wagging and head-rolling — as if he needs to let us know *he* is the one with the tango in his soul — in contrast to his equally adept but lower-key colleagues.

Bravo's opening concept for this spectacle — of personifying the bandoneon as a man "in search of its passion", ie night, which is personified by a woman (cue for the first duet by Sandor and Miriam) — proves a slim idea. So does the suggestion that certain numbers demonstrate a historical and social progression of the tango from its steamy origins to respectability. No, the main point is the dancing, and the choreography, by the dancers themselves, adds up to a medley of star spots, slickly blended, in which

**DAVID DOUGILL**  
on strenuous shows,  
one from Argentina  
and one from Japan

the duos score their special points.

Guillermo and Cecilia are ultra-dazzling in their footwork — a real battle of legs. Carlos Borquez and Ines, the programme remarks, "exhibit an unusual on-stage relationship" in which Borquez is "rough and unruly". I would say he was a huggy-bear type just pretending to be nasty. Whatever the variations in style and technical tricks between these very many tangos, they all end inexorably with a musical climax of "berroom-boom-boom", and the woman submissively back-bending to her domineering partner, spot-on with the last "boom". Whether the tango is a particularly non-PC dance form is a question I won't address just now; but theatrically this is a show that jugs

exhilaration with relentlessness.

Quite *autre\* chose* is Saburo Teshigawara, Japan's foremost figure in contemporary dance, who appeared with his Karas company as a highlight of LIFT at the Queen Elizabeth Hall last weekend. On his home ground, 14 years ago, Teshigawara — a sculptor turned dancer — buried himself up to the neck in sand for eight hours for an experimental live-art performance. His first British appearances were on stage, and mercifully shorter, but startlingly original — I saw him do amazing things on shards of glass in one piece, and he was equally compelling in another, in a decor of massed books and shoes (with a live raven as his obliging co-star).

The new work, titled *Noject*, is different again, and much more a company piece (14 dancers), though Teshigawara is still the focal performer — as well as being choreographer, costume and lighting designer, and "scenographer". The three-wall set of rusty iron panels is not credited in the programme, so it was probably by him, too. *Noject*,

we're told, is an elision of "noise" and "object". The noise is often deafening; it builds from a basic hum-drone to a cacophony of machinery, screeching and thundering, and is linked to the bashing on and off of multiple searing lights. The objects include an invasion of wheel hubs, steel balls and a trundling wall of radio speakers.

From all this, Teshigawara creates strange dance images: the slow-motion advance of black-masked-and-gowned figures that begins the piece; funereal rituals; an eerie crawling procession of stocking-faced, fin-backed creatures; a line-up of dancers beating the floor with metal rods; and furious bursts of fierce, athletic movement for the tribe, juxtaposed with tableaux that leave dancers dotted about the stage, upright or recumbent, in weirdly unrelated positions.

During one of these latter moments, and while a woman with a black blocked-out head was stomping around on electrically amplified shoes, I realised what had been niggling at me — this was something Magritte might have thought up if he had been a choreographer. *Noject* is baffling, brutal, intriguing, bombastic, stunning and exhausting by turns. Teshigawara's mercurial performance includes, among its other attractions, feats of balance you can't quite believe you've seen. □