

Dance & Opera

Tango lives on at MGM



The music is wonderful, so is the dancing, but the MGM's *Forever Tango: The Eternal Dance* is more of a concert than a show and, as such, will probably appeal more to true aficionados of tango than to most Las Vegas visitors.

That isn't the tango's fault; its art-craft, and often is, presented in popular theatrical form that appeals to a wide audience. And it isn't the fault of *Forever Tango's* performers, most of whom are exceptional. It's the production itself, lacking variety and an overall choreographic concept, that might fail to communicate to the uninitiated.

The program's first two segments were exceptions to the above and both were credited as the "idea and conception" of Luis Bravo, the company's artistic producer/director; they were marvelously theatrical, imaginative and created high expectations which weren't fulfilled by the remaining 22 numbers.

In the opening, the curtain rose on a mist-filled stage, gradually revealing a lone musician playing a bandoneon (an instrument resembling a small accordion, its voice ranging from organ to flute). Downstage from him, the movements of a large model bandoneon mirrored the plaintive music. A male dancer emerged from the replica and was joined by a young woman; together they performed a sensual tango. Like a Dali painting, the scene was wonderfully dream-like and surrealistic.

It was followed by a colorful bordello sequence performed enthusiastically by the entire company. The dance couples, handsomely costumed, were presented in an atmosphere both licentious and elegant. One of the highlights was a fight between two men in which an interesting dance duet developed from their physical struggle.

From there, the program became repetitious, the usual sequence being orchestra, followed by dance couple, followed by orchestra and so on, in a detached series of routines. The artists were good, but were presented in a manner that failed to create the unified identity of a "production."

Each of the seven dance couples set their own choreography, a policy that surely added to the production's lack of cohesion. The shortage of ensemble numbers left the dancers little opportunity to interact or to fill the stage, resulting in it frequently looking stark (the minimal and unimaginative lighting did nothing to help, though I understand it has since been improved).

Most of the dance couples were excellent, particularly on the distaff side. I was especially impressed with Guillermina and Roberto Reis with their good looks and flexible, fluid movements. They displayed plenty of flashy footwork,

but even more impressive was the way they'd sometimes use a leg as they might an arm and hand, gliding it caressingly along the partner's body.

There was a unique attraction of opposites between Carlos Gavito and Marcella Duran: he, suave and mature; she, a wild young tigress. Cecilia, of

"Guillermo and Cecilia," possessed long, graceful lines and projected a special elegance and warmth.

These three couples joined forces in one of the too few ensemble dances, a lively and refreshing number set to the famous *La Cumparsita*.



MAL DOBECKER

The consistently strongest element of the production was the 11-piece orchestra under the direction of Lisandro Adrover, who also did the fabulous arrangements. The ensemble created a rich symphonic sound with four bandoneons, five strings (violins, viola, cello and bass), piano and keyboards.

Each member of the orchestra was a consummate artist. Just one example was Mario Aerolaza who, in his moving piano solo, assembled clusters of notes that seemed to chase each other in furious tango rhythms.

Singer Carlos Morel had strong presence and moved like a dancer. His voice was pleasing, though not as strong or darkly metallic as I personally prefer for tango. His versions of two songs, both sung in Spanish, were so dramatic that he should have offered their spoken recitatives in English so the entire audience would have had some idea of the reason for the histrionics — assuming there was one.

This was my first visit to the MGM's Hollywood Theatre. It seats about 650, is comfortable and appears to have good sight lines from every position. Beverages were reasonably priced.

It's been said that tango, like a lover, is something one doesn't merely like, but is mad about. If, like myself, you are one of those "mad" ones, make your reservations quickly because *Forever Tango* closes Feb. 7.

Forever Tango

WHERE: Hollywood Theatre, MGM

WHEN: Thurs, Fri., Sat, 8 & 10:30 p.m.; Mon., Tues., & Wed., 9 p.m.; Sunday, 3 & 8 p.m.

PRICE: \$40 plus tax
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