

'Forever Tango' heats up Broadway in style

By Gary Parks
Special for
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — Step aside, you vamps from *Chicago* and whores from *The Life*. Sex on Broadway is suddenly a lot more sophisticated now that *Forever Tango* (★★★½ out of four) has opened at the Walter Kerr Theater.

Born in the brothels of Buenos Aires around the turn of the century, the tango has become dance shorthand for smoldering passion. (Think Al Pacino in *Scent of a Woman*.) *Forever Tango* shows that the style is more than steamy — it's smart, even funny.

Creator/director Luis Bravo has assembled eight distinctive couples who show off the form's astonishing range in a revue that alternates virtuosic dancing with musical interludes played by an onstage orchestra. The plaintive moan of the *bandoneón*, that small, square cousin of the accordion, pervades the evening. There's no story (ignore the confusing program notes), but there's plenty of action.

The smallest changes, from a bent knee to a rising up on tiptoe, can have a remarkable erotic effect. The big movements are devastating: In one vignette, an obviously moneyed gentleman (Carlos Gavito) hands a kneeling young beauty (Marcela Durán) his handkerchief, and she shines his shoes with a shiver of delight.

This is a world where women of all ages are exotic creatures, and men are their proud, possessive partners. Young Sandra Bootz is a flame-haired ingenue adored by Gabriel Ortega, a junior Valentino in tails. Laura Marcarie, an Isa-



By Marty Sotri

'Forever Tango': Miriam Larici and Diego DiFalco are among the dancers who bring tango's sensual drama to Broadway.

bella Rossellini look-alike with a perpetual pout, and wide-shouldered escort Carlos Vera are a decade older with a hint of something kinky between them.

Comic relief comes from the diminutive Claudio Mendoza and Luis Castro: They toss off some of the evening's fanciest footwork with their spoofs on tango conventions. Most enthralling are Cecilia Saia and Guillermo Merlo. Saia is a long-stemmed blonde; Merlo looks like a matinee idol. Clutching each other tightly, legs dueling like sabers, they conjure a small drama in the space of little more than three minutes.

The elegantly costumed cast deserves better than the plain black backdrop that substitutes for a set. And the opening and closing scenes of a couple portraying a giant *bandoneón* and its offspring, the tango, are absurd. These gaffes aside, *Forever Tango* is a sensuous, seductive pleasure.