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Argentina's gift to dance is performed in stunning style in 'Forever Tango'

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FOR THE INQUIRER

Tango is an expansive tradition: It can tell stories, express personalities, conjure historical periods. And above all, as Luis Bravo's virtuosic, Broadway-bound *Forever Tango* demonstrates, tango offers an endlessly fascinating translation of erotic desire into choreographed movement. This dance spectacle began its run of almost three weeks on Annenberg Center's Zellerbach stage Tuesday.

The seven pairs of dancers maintained a stunningly high level of performance throughout, with syrup-smooth partnering, legwork of breathtaking intricacy and speed, amazing lifts and split-second ending poses. In just one example, Jorge Torres and Karina Piazza flicked

For unreserved enjoyment, check p.c. concerns at the door.

their feet out like flashing comments along the parallel line of their twined bodies. The audience gasped when she finished that number upside down in Torres' arms.

Only one dance (out of nearly 20) crossed over into dance-theater: a story-piece set in a Buenos Aires bordello in the 1880s — the high-temperature incubator, it's said, of this dance form. Here, a macho display among the men slid between fighting and male bonding, until they finally paired off seductively with scantily clad women.

Mostly, however, the sense of

story arises not from a choreographed narrative but from the dances themselves, from the shifting dynamics within the different couples. It's advisable to check your p.c. concerns at the door for unreserved enjoyment, as much of these dynamics involve bald expressions of sexual dominance and submission.

For instance, in the bordello piece, the brothel owner had his dance partner shine his shoe — as he rested it, fully footed, on her knee. And, more often than I remember in other tango performances, the women here seemed to end up on the floor, gazing up at their partners.

Yet, in the duet *Libertango*, for which the program notes explained

See **TANGO** on C6

'Forever Tango,' at Zellerbach

TANGO from C1

"the male dancer hypnotizes her [his partner], and forces her into an act of submission," the suave Cecilia Saia proved a strong partner, surrounding the predatory Guillermo Merlo with her legs, and creating a back-and-forth skirmish of darting feet.

It was in the dancing of the marvelous Claudia Mendoza and Luis Castro that some lighthearted tweaking of tango's conventions modified the evening's intensity. Apparently poking fun at a pompous tango style of the Argentine middle class, these masters delicately pushed its rigorous gestures into burlesque, with wind-up-doll fanny-pumping, legs raised at just the wrong angle, and a little flailing of feet on the lifts.

Choreographer Luis Bravo, himself a classically trained cellist, knows the importance of music to maintaining the tango mood. The 11-piece onstage orchestra, led by Lisandro Adrover on the accordion-like bandoneon, provided more than the usual accompaniment. In several musical interludes, Adrover (a veteran of the long-touring *Tango Argentino*) proved an intelligent composer and arranger, building on tango's traditional swooping syncopations to make passages of orchestral complexity. Singer Carlos Morel offered two over-the-top songs of love and longing in Spanish.

Bravo has by and large chosen not to expand his vocabulary with ballet or modern-dance additions, but to deliver superb tango, performed to the utmost. It's hard to argue with that winning formula.

Review: *Dance*



Miriam Larici and Fabio Narvaez are one of seven pairs of dancers performing in the Broadway-bound "Forever Tango," playing at the Zellerbach Theatre through Feb. 2.