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Dance

'Tango' Revue at Wilshire Plies Emotion of Fatalism

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Born a century ago in the lower depths of an immigrant subculture, the tango still embodies a sense of hopeless desire and estrangement. This fatalism alone makes it superbly theatrical—a quality demonstrated anew in "Forever Tango: The Eternal Dance," which opened a five-week run on Friday at the Wilshire Theatre.

Seen in a preliminary version at UCLA four years ago, Luis Bravo's mostly Argentine revue envisions the tango as the love-child of the bandoneón (a German relative of the accordion) and the Buenos Aires night. The bandoneón is male, earthy and mournful. The night is female, alluring and mysterious.

"Forever Tango" insists on the primacy of music in this relationship, with Act I, in particular, structured as a tango concert punctuated by brief dances. Augmented by strings and keyboards, the bandoneón is definitely master here.

Inevitably, however, the tango belongs to the night. No matter how fine Lisandro Adrover's 11-member, all-male band may be, no matter how generous the time allotted to its artistry, the dancing women will not be denied. Billed only by their first names, they make each duet a heightened emotional experience by confronting their stoic or brooding partners with passionate, unpredictable forays into self-realization.

There's young Norma, who dances with suave Luis Pereyra—so elegant, so unattainable, wearing dresses slit or pulled back to fully expose her showgirl legs. A woman of contradictions.

There's the spectacularly pliant Inés who dances with volatile Carlos Borquez and seems wildly,

eternally hungry for his love. A woman of extremes.

When Sandor and Miriam dance, you see—as in bravura ballet and ice-skating partnerships—the physical daring of their choreography become a metaphor for other kinds of risk in a relationship. And when Carlos and Alicia dance, the tango becomes a private language, with the woman rocking gently in her partner's arms, drawing from him a tenderness that, in turn, inspires her to bolder statements of devotion.

Best of all, perhaps, veterans Gloria and Eduardo—both short, thick, weathered and fast on their feet. After a lifetime together, the patrician Gloria treats Eduardo not as her partner but her fate: She furiously kicks at him, twists and dodges as he tries to manipulate her but ultimately melds with him in a deep backbend—or throws herself onto his hip as if tossing a rose from a balcony.

"Forever Tango" also boasts two capable singers—Carlos Morel and Sandra Cabal—along with an atmospheric black-on-black bandstand milieu, varied as much as possible by lighting designer Ernesto Diz.

It's a lighter, more diluted showcase of Argentine traditions than "Tango Argentino" (seen locally in 1986 and '87). But it's got the moves, the mood, the sound of tango in its blood, plus the heart-stopping illusion that all five couples are pursuing the deepest fantasy of their lives on the dance floor.

■ "Forever Tango: The Eternal Dance" continues through July 17 at the Wilshire Theatre, 8440 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills. Performances are scheduled on Tuesdays through Fridays at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 2 and 8 p.m., Sundays at 3 and 7:30 p.m. Tickets: \$17-\$40. Information: (213) 480-3232.