

THE TORONTO STAR

ARTSNEWS & REVIEWS

It takes 14 to tango with kinetic carnality

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DANCE CRITIC

The tango has been aptly described as "the vertical expression of a horizontal desire," and if you can't find that definition in the Oxford English Dictionary you will find it on the stage of the Princess of Wales Theatre between now and May 10.

The lexicographers in this instance are the 14 dancers of Luis Bravo's *Forever Tango*, the show that raised the temperature of Toronto for 15 weeks in the fall of 1996 and is set to challenge the thermometer once again.

To be personal for a moment, I once danced the tango as a college freshman anxious to get out of gym class. Had I recognized then the amatory potential of the dance, I never would have gone on to the cha-cha-cha.

The dancers of *Forever Tango*, the gentlemen in particular, are not all young and not all svelte, but they are honors graduates of the kinetic college of carnality and they move with a combination of oily smoothness and sudden stealth that would do honor to the average panther.

They emerged from out of the darkness, as befitted representatives of a dance form bred in the brothels of Buenos Aires, the men in fedoras and the women in danger of chest colds.

And they danced as if their legs were auditioning for service in a Cuisinart, slicing the air in front of their partners, wrapping them in an embrace worthy of copulatory intent.

There is, of course, copulatory intent in this dance. It portrays, as the Argentine philosopher Ricardo Gomez has observed, the relationship between the prostitute and her client.

The serious movement, in other words, takes place from the waist

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down, with the upper body kept formally stiff.

It is, as the dancers of *Forever Tango* demonstrated, the combination of this elegant formality and the fires down below that gives the dance such a wonderful esthetic tension.

But is it a dance that can sustain 100 intermissionless minutes in a theatre? You bet it is, when performed by copulators like these, accompanied by as fine a tango orchestra as you will likely encounter this side of Evita-land.

The heart of a tango orchestra is that small, square-shaped cousin of the accordion, the soulful-sounding bandoneón. *Forever Tango's* crack 11-man orchestra boasts four of them, with music director Lisandro Adrover using his with an especially heart-baring human expressiveness.

The resident singer, Miguel A. Velazquez, did some heart-baring of his own in a bar-bleached baritone, and Luis Bravo's lighting further enhanced the mood of loneliness and lust.

But ah, those dancers. Visualize, if you will, the sight of a broad-shouldered, overweight gentleman of a certain age in a tuxedo, gliding a stunning younger woman around the stage, her hair cascading over her curvaceous shoulders every time he bends her backward.

Suddenly, as the music pauses, he reaches into his vest pocket, takes out a handkerchief to wipe his brow and, with the music's return, calmly resumes his exploration of the southern regions of her anatomy.

If this is what advanced middle age brings with it, let the tango begin.