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Raw passion and real sweat: the dancers in 'Forever Tango' display a virtuosity born of deep feeling

The sultriest, sexiest show in London

THOSE who know the tango only through the slick precision, the toothpaste smiles and the hand-sewn sequins of *Come Dancing* are in for a surprise at this terrific show. It is, by several miles, the sexiest production on the London stage, and I haven't forgotten the Raymond Revuebar.

The tango was born in the dockside brothels and bars of Buenos Aires in the 1880s, and the fine, all-Argentinian company haven't lost touch with the roots of this

extraordinary form of urban art.

Indeed Bernard Shaw's description of dancing as the vertical expression of a horizontal desire seems curiously inadequate here. Whoever said you could only make love lying down, after all? The couples in *Forever Tango* don't dance so much cheek-to-cheek as crotch-to-crotch, and the evening might best be described as a series of ecstatic kneetremblers.

One of the opening sequences is actually set in a brothel, and many of the subsequent routines seem to reflect the relationship between a prostitute and either her pimp or her punter.

In a succession of brief, explosive *pas de deux*, the men usually seem to be in rigorous control, but the women are constantly displaying flashes of fire, independence and moments of complete abandonment.

The couples allow each other's legs an astonishing intimacy as they interlock and interweave with amazing speed and dexterity, but the sense of a frenetic, at times frankly menacing sexuality often gives way to a yielding sensual languor. At its best the tango offers a remarkable marriage between precision and raw passion.

There is no sense here of the heartlessly slick international touring attraction. Production values are minimal, and the sweat is for real. Nor, as is increas-

ingly the case with classical ballet, do you get the impression of dancers transformed into androgynous gymnasts, all technique and no heart.

Many of the performers looks as though they've been round the block a few times. The women, in their clingy slashed skirts and fishnet stockings, are undoubtedly sexy, but not all of them are young.

A couple of the men look as though they'd be entitled to a Buenos Aires bus-pass.

But the suggestion of flawed humanity somehow makes the spectacle the more moving.

Passion, the show seems to be saying, isn't exclusively the preserve of gilded youth, and as the beautiful Marcela Duran fawns meltingly on the silver-haired Roberto Tonet, you feel like cheering him on.

The music is every bit as important as the dancing, some of it written by the great Astor Piazzolla, king of the *tango nuevo*. The superb on-stage band perform on their own as well as accompanying the dancers, and it is music that gets into your bloodstream, fast and jaunty at times, but more often aching and tormented, throbbing with regret and desire.

The sound is dominated by the eloquent keening of the bandoneón (a type of accordion), and the sight of the musical director, Lisandro Adrover, a curly-haired Colin Welland lookalike, pumping his squeezebox and

pulling more agonised and ecstatic expressions than the lead guitarist in a heavy metal band, is alone worth the price of admission.

Both the dancers and the musicians in *Forever Tango* display real virtuosity, but it is a virtuosity with its roots in deep feeling, not an empty display of flashy technique. I can think of no better show for lovers on a sultry summer night.

Tickets: 0171 950 8800

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Forever Tango
Strand Theatre