

DANCE REVIEW

'Tango' as Sizzling as Ever

Argentine dance hit returns briefly with even better dancing

BY OCTAVIO ROCA

Chronicle Dance Critic

Luis Bravo's "Forever Tango" is back in style. The spectacular Argentine musical that San Francisco made a hit is now at Herbst Theatre for a limited time after a world tour that included a healthy run in London's West End.

It is easy to see and feel why "Forever Tango" became the Bay Area's longest-running dance spectacle. The show is much the same — exhilarating and impossibly sexy. Yet in some ways, not least of all the dancing, it is even better than when it sizzled for 92 weeks in 1994 and 1995 at Theatre on the Square.

There are familiar faces and bodies from the earlier run, including the witty veterans Luis Castro and Claudia Mendoza, as well as the amazing Carlos Gavito. But the troupe also includes more than a few members of the new, fearless generation of tango dancers who also give testimony to the dance's vibrant, dangerous sensuality.

The duo known simply as Sandra and Gabriel, who are raising temperatures on-screen in Alan Parker's new film "Evita," bring together striking looks and an almost insolent virtuosity. The Balanchine-an intricacy and sheer magnetism of their phrasing in the classic "La Cumparsita" and later in Astor Piazzolla's "Libertango" stood out among Thursday evening's many highlights.

The dashing Carlos Vera's electrifying aplomb was more than a match for Laura

FOREVER TANGO: Dance musical. Directed and choreographed by Luis Bravo. (Through January 4 at Herbst Theatre, Van Ness at McAllister. Tickets: \$19-\$45. Call (415) 392-4400.)

Marcarie's frantic embraces to the beat: More than once they brought down the house in wild applause.

Argentina's soulful rhythm — one thing you will not find in any version of "Evita" — is alive and well, teasing and defiant in "Forever Tango." Few dances are more elegant. None is less inhibited. And few are this disarming.

The show at Herbst differs only slightly from its original incarnation or from the excellent cast album. "Forever Tango" again opened in darkness, broken by a solitary dancer's line. Fabio Narvaez popped out of a giant bandoneon and seemed to dance with night itself, personified by Miriam Larici, who appeared as if from thin air. Their meeting began with little kicks, the grace notes of this often-languid dance that can turn violent with a glance. The men's sexy swagger and the women's sultry lines surrounded each melody as the dancers wrapped their legs around each other. Passion was not merely suggested.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse themselves might have found the tango scary — and irresistible. Like choreographic foreplay, each number in "Forever Tango" took its time to seduce the audi-

ence, then sped up in total abandon to some very torrid climaxes.

Bravo's choreographic achievement is considerable, with results that both ring true and break ground. Few other recent musicals or ballets have matched the unassuming sexiness or the ineffable longing that these dancers exude.

The sex is also in the music, of course, from the contrabass' guttural cries to the wail of the bandoneon, the accordion's sultry cousin with the rummy, raspy voice.

A curious thing happened to orchestras at the turn of the century, when the tango came to be. Until then, the difference between the forces needed for Schubert and for pop was one of size and intention. Then from the New World came revolt.

In the United States, strings gave way to saxophones and trombones, and the big band sound was born. Cuba kept the strings but surrounded them with a battery of claves, congas and bongos that changed their sound forever. Brazil followed suit with a vengeance, but when change came to Argentina its variation was the bandoneon.

Nothing else sounds quite like this, certainly not the German accordion that spawned it nor the French one of Apache dance.

This mating sound in the urban wilderness is so sad that the sheer exuberance when it reaches its impact can come as a shock. And, as before, exuberance is still **'TANGO':** Page C2 Col. 1



BY MICHAEL MACOR/THE CHRONICLE

Carlos Vera and Laura Marcarie danced 'La Mariposa' in 'Forever Tango'