

# Tribute showcases full range of tango

By Joseph T. Rozmiarek  
ADVERTISER DRAMA CRITIC

It's serious business, the tango.

First there's the music — flurid, dramatic, throbbing with passionate rhythm and propelled by driving intensity.

Then there's the movement — stylized and elegant, yet sensual and violent, as dancers in tuxedos and evening gowns combine expressionless faces with intricate footwork and long, frozen pauses.

Luis Bravo's "Forever Tango," running through Sunday at the Hawaii Theatre, is a dual tribute to the dance and the bandoneon, a concertina-like hand organ that is the backbone of the music.

While it may seem the pinnacle of sophistication and elegance today, the music and dance originated in the brothels of 19th-century Buenos Aires, mingling African, Indian and Latin influences in a representation of the interaction between a prostitute and her pimp. Not surprisingly, the performance was considered obscene before it gained acceptance and then prominence.

The first company number of the performance exploits those origins through sensual choreography, with the men competing for the women's attention, posing, preening, exchanging partners, fighting and gambling. A man-to-man duel erupts and is allowed to continue, with bandoneons mourning in the background, until the brothel manager breaks it up.

The show's prologue has suggested the dancers were born from the instrument, as the production's featured pair, Valentina Villarroel and Claudio Gonzalez, perform a ritualized routine of attraction and dominance. He wears a muscle shirt and leather pants; she's in a filmy gown and impossibly high heels. Between them, her translucent shawl serves as the lifeline that alternately connects, binds and enshrouds them.

Six more dancing pairs make up



No credit information

Valentina Villarroel and Claudio Gonzalez are the featured pair of six in "Forever Tango," a revue of tango dance styles and music.

the cast, representing various tango styles, earning a featured spot in each act and joining together in the full-company numbers. By the final curtain, even the uninitiated will begin to differentiate among them and identify personal favorites. Each tells its own story.

Francisco Mercado and Natalia

Hills blaze with incredible footwork, incorporating a series of fast kicks between the partner's legs into a blur of controlled fire. Cesar Coelho and Melina Brufman represent youthful freshness and a ballet influence with pirouettes and poses that add a fluid, lyrical line. Marcelo Bernadaz and Veronica Gardella

## 'Forever Tango'

2, 7:30 p.m. today  
and tomorrow

Hawaii Theatre

\$55-\$22.50

528-0506, 593-8333

overlay the dance with comic meaning — as if Dick Van Dyke and Mary Tyler Moore simultaneously discovered the tango and mood-enhancing stimulants.

Costuming adds to the appeal. While the men are nearly indistinguishable in their tuxedos and patent leather pumps, the women's attire shares an emphasis on breasts and hips, with skirts slit high and hemlines allowing full freedom below the knee. Everyone's hair is slicked, pulled and tied tightly out of the way.

Lighting is equally dramatic, spotlighting central performers on a bare stage from a dark, moody background.

Singer Carlos Morel performs two appropriately passionate solos, communicating vocally the same yearning and sensuality that propel the dance.

The show travels with its own dozen-piece orchestra that accompanies the dancers and performs several numbers on its own. It includes four senior gentlemen on the bandoneon, often featured in sidebar concertina conversations and solo interludes. Strings, piano and keyboard complete the effect.

Each instrument is supported with at least one microphone, and the sounds blend effectively in the large space without undue exaggeration.

"Forever Tango" played in San Francisco in the mid-1990s, with subsequent tours across America and Europe and a year on Broadway.