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DANCE REVIEW | 'FOREVER TANGO'

Sex and Danger Slithering at the Shubert

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A fair number of quips about shows for tired businessmen, or at least tired Argentine businessmen, come to mind while watching "Forever Tango," which opened on Saturday at the Shubert Theater. The revue has about the same balance of vital tango dancing and music, nostalgia-inducing song and schlock as in its first appearance on Broadway seven summers ago. Conceived and directed by Luis Bravo, an Argentine musician and record producer, "Forever Tango" has toured the world since, a sultry Latin variation on "Riverdance."

But there is real gold for those patient enough to wait for the second act, after the show has sped through a supposed history of tango dancing whose only recognizable vignette is a tacky bordello number early in the evening. The idea there, presumably, is that women began to dance the hitherto all-male tango in earnest when it arrived with the customers after late 19th-century sojourns in the streets and cafes of Buenos Aires. As the tango was taken up by daring middle- and upper-class ballrooms and moved north to the United States and east to Europe, the dance's rough working-class edges were smoothed and its raw sensuality distilled into what pours out across the Shubert stage.



Sex and danger still shimmer like a summer heat wave beneath the surface of the most traditional dancing in "Forever Tango." The taut torsos and stylized leg and footwork of Carlos Vera and Laura Marcarie — he wonderfully thuggish and she sexily deadpan — say it all in wittily stylized dancing in several numbers.

At the other end of the spectrum from their tantalizingly minimalist razzle-dazzle is the performing of the comic duo Marcelo Bernadaz and Verónica Gardella. They are pure cartoon renditions of an overeager man and an increasingly interested woman. With his misplaced cowlick, Mr. Bernadaz resembles Dagwood of American comic-strip fame. But their lightning-speed, cross-stage backward slithers, rubber bodies and her propeller legs are the true heart of their virtuoso dancing.

Miguel Velázquez had only to begin his crooning for the audience to clap softly with delighted recognition of each song. For those in the audience with no knowledge of Latin popular music, Mr. Velázquez's voice was enough to conjure up potent images of piano bars in imaginary small beachfront hotels of simpler times. The fine onstage orchestra delivered on standards like "Jealousy" and "Besame Mucho." But there was also delicately atmospheric solo piano playing by Jorge Vernieri and, even more important, star turns on the accordionlike bandoneón, performed by Victor Lavallén.

"Forever Tango" was choreographed by its dancers, veteran tango-show and competition performers, who also included Jorge Torres, Marcela Durán, Guillermina Quiroga, Gabriel Ortega, Sandra Bootz, Natalia Hills, Francisco Forquera, Melina Brufman, Claudio Gonzalez, Juan Pablo Horvath and Alejandra Gutty.