

'Forever Tango' Set to Spark Erotic Passion

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Blind Lt. Col. Slade (Al Pacino) in 1992's "Scent of a Woman" detects the scent of a beautiful woman (Gabrielle Anwar) and in the movie's most memorable scene, spontaneously leads her into a tango. The year 1994's "True Lies" saw Arnold "wid da muscles" Schwarzenegger take Tia Carrere through the thrilling dance step, in another of many movie moments featuring a woman, a man and the Tango.

Tango in the movies has left a lasting image in the minds of viewers and the glamorous dance tradition has aroused many a viewer's sensuality. A magic spell seems to be cast on those who watch on while the woman in a long and glittering dress is led by the man (Tango is dominated by the male lead) who with a flick of the leg, a tug of the hand, a tap of the foot and an arch of the eyebrow, engages in a partnership that shouts with passion.

Despite its popular appeal in the movies, tango has yet to win many adherents in Korea. With the arrival of an internationally renowned tango troupe, the time may be right to ignite the passion and glamour of the erotic dance of Argentina in the Korean public.

"Forever Tango," the celebrated entertainment event on Broadway, will perform on June 4-5 at the KBS

Hall in Pusan and on June 8-13 at the Seoul Arts Center in southern Seoul.

The troupe currently enjoys an open-ended run on Broadway and is the longest running tango event since June of last year. "Forever Tango" was honored with a 1998 Tony Award nomination for "Best Choreography" and received nominations for four 1998 New York Drama Desk Awards. The New York Times called it "A Must-See!" and daily newspaper USA Today said, "Forever Tango shows that the style is more than steamy — it's smart, even funny ... a sensuous, seductive pleasure."

The tango troupe is composed of 14 tango dancers from Argentina, a vocalist and an on-stage 11-member orchestra, including "the instrument of the tango," called the bandoneon.

Its director/creator Luis Bravo, who is an Argentine native, is a classical musician of the cello. His distinguished credits include appearances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Colon Theatre Opera House, the Buenos Aires Philharmonic and other prestigious ensembles. "The tango is a feeling that you dance," says the 43-year-old Bravo. "It's a story you tell in three minutes. It's passionate, it's melancholic. It's tender and it's violent."

The production tells the story of the birth of tango in 19th century Argentina. Behind the fancy dresses and flamboyant movements, the tango renders with unique artistic aplomb, the culture and history of Argentina.

The tango has been used by Argentines to interpret music and poetry. Ironically, despite its urban and sophisticated image, the tango was born out of the despair and fear felt by poor European immigrants and the black population on the outskirts of Buenos Aires in around 1880.

The social outcasts of that time would drown their troubles in a few drinks and try to find some companionship. From this heady, intermingling cultural brew emerged the music that then became the tango. Though musical historians argue over its exact origins, it is generally accepted that the tango is a combination of elements from many peoples — the strong rhythm of Africa, the candombe drum beat (known as tango) and the popular music of the pampas (extensive grassy treeless plains) known as the milonga, which combined Indian rhythms with the music of early Spanish colonialists. The eroticism of tango is implicit rather than explicit; body contact is minimal, while body language speaks volumes.

Though it might be born of a lonely and violent existence, tango has emerged as among the most vibrant of Argentina's cultural contributions. Originally shunned by the Argentine society as indecent, it became a craze in upper class Paris. The tango quickly spread across Europe and to America, eventually being re-imported home to Argentina with its eroticism intact.

"The tango is more than an intricate dance. It is a feeling, an emotion and

the culture created by the thousands of men who were forced to leave their homes, their families, their wives and their lovers by the desperate poverty of a disintegrating Europe in the late 19th century," said Bravo.

The earlier tradition of tango saw great innovations during its golden age in the 1940s under the choreography of legendary dancer Carlos Estevez. When Juan Peron rose to power in 1946 the tango reached the height of its popularity when president Peron and his wife Evita embraced the dance wholeheartedly. With Evita's death in 1952, the tango fell from the spotlight and with the invasion of American rock-and-roll, the tango seemed out of step with the times.

During the 1950s and 1980s when Argentina was in the grip of a dictatorship, public gathering of any kind was discouraged and people stopped dancing. Many of the best artists went into exile or stopped working altogether.

Recently, the tango has been designated as a national cultural asset and will be a demonstration event at the Sydney 2000 Olympics with much hope riding on it to become an official event.

Ticket prices range from 30,000 to 80,000 won. Weekday performances begin at 7:30 p.m. in Seoul (7 p.m. in Pusan), while two sessions are scheduled for 3:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. (7 p.m. in Pusan) on weekends. Call 051-760-1177 for more information on Pusan performances and 02-2237-9565 for the Seoul venue.

