



'FOREVER TANGO' SIZZLES: Gilberto Santa Rosa & the cast. Photo: Walter McBride



Theater Review

Broadway's Forever Tango: Muy caliente

FOREVER TANGO

Conceived & directed by Luis Bravo

Choreographed by the Dancers

Walter Kerr Theatre

219 West 48th Street

Through September 15, 2013

(212-239-6200), www.forevertangobroadway.com

By David NouNou

Yes, the names Karina Smirnoff and Maksim Chmerkovskiy are the familiar ones that might induce you to want to see *Forever Tango*, but you will be short-changing yourself if that's the main reason. If you are expecting a gilded ballroom, sequins, feathers, form-fitting costumes, endless time-consuming videos of has-been celebrities whining, obnoxious judges and marginally suitable singers and musicians, then you switched to the wrong channel and theater. What you will see at the Walter Kerr Theatre in *Forever Tango* is a night in an unadorned Argentinean ballroom, tuxedoed men, elegant ladies, who are exquisite Argentinean dancers, the soulful singer Gilberto Santa Rosa, an expert 11-piece orchestra consisting of four bandoneons (concertinas), a piano, cello, bass, violins, viola and keyboard. And yes, we also get Karina and Maksim, which is a mixed blessing.

I have to start with what we see and hear first: The musicians, all of whom are onstage and of an older generation, but these men are pros and have probably been playing their instruments since their youth, have perfected their craft to excellence, and generate music that is hauntingly spine-chilling. The three central musicians are Victor Lavellen who as well as being the lead bandoneon player (absolutely mesmerizing) is also the orchestra director; Jorge Vernieri is rhapsodic on the piano; and Luis Bravo, who not only presents this show but also plays the cello to perfection.

As in any ballroom, there is the singer. In *Evita*, there was Migaldi. In this case, there is the soulful, Grammy-winning Latin singer Gilberto Santa Rosa. His voice is warm and full-bodied. Alas, not knowing the language, the lyrics were lost on me, but the Spanish-speaking audience members were enthralled with his four songs.

Of course, the *raison d'être* of this piece is the dancers. The passion that seethes on the stage is palpable. This is Argentinean tango at its finest. There are eight couples and it is impossible to select a standout. They are each given their moment in the spotlight and, thankfully, they appear in both acts of the show. However, the lead couple who are also on the cover of Playbill is Victoria Galota and Juan Paulo Horvath; they exude sensuality, as do the other seven couples. My particular favorite number was in Act II "La Cumparsita," breathtakingly done by three couples: Hernan Lazart and Florencia Blanco, Zumo Leguizamon and Belen Bartolome, and Sebastian Ripoll and Mariana Bojanich, their timing and synchronized footwork is astounding. I was so hoping for more of such moments.

And this brings us to Karina and Maksim, both known for being two of the most gorgeous dancers on the hit ABC TV show "Dancing With The Stars." I said earlier that they are a mixed blessing, and they are. Of course, they are the couple that the audience most identifies with and every entry of theirs is greeted with applause and recognition, which leaves the other couples at a disadvantage. They exude sex but not sensuality. Spoiler alert: Maksim mercifully tries to be authentic by not taking his shirt off but leaves it open enough to see his torso. He does his flirtatious moves and gives us his smoldering bedroom eyes,

directed at us and not his partner.

This works wonderfully as TV entertainment, but for this piece, it dilutes the authenticity of the Argentinean tango. Karina, even more beautiful in person and when not speaking, seems out of her element and lacking passion and stage presence, which is amazing because she is a talented dancer.

If you enjoy professional dancing, especially the Argentinean tango, I strongly urge you to see *Forever Tango*. The dancers are superb and crisp, the music is mesmerizingly beautiful; and, as a bonus, no annoying judges and whining contestants.

Edited by Scott Harrah

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