



BWW Review: TANGUERA, Sadler's Wells

by Vikki Jane Vile Jul 22, 2017



Tango sensation *Tanguera* first premiered 15 years ago in Buenos Aires, promising an authentic take on the provocative and sensual spectacle with a 30-strong ensemble cast.



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Unlike the frequently seen tango showcases of recent times, *Tanguera* tells a story. It sometimes chooses to drop and pick up the narrative to suit its cause, however its depiction of La Boca and the journey we take through it's various neighbourhoods, cafes and brothels make it unique and universally enjoyable.

A picture of innocence, Giselle (Melody Celatti) is quite literally fresh off the boat, wide-eyed and expectant. Of course, within 30 seconds she has fallen in love with smouldering dockworker Lorenzo (Esteban Domenichini) and what ensues are a series of contrasting scenes displaying tango in various locations, all hanging by the thread of their love story.

I have a soft spot for *Tanguera*; it's the first dance show I was ever asked to review seven years ago at Sadler's Wells. I was as wide-eyed as Giselle watching it, and caught up in the speed and freneticism of the footwork and the drama of the sleazy nightclub where she is forced to work as a prostitute by Gaudencio (Dabel Zanabria) and his team of baddies. Today, however, it all feels so entirely predictable and clichéd. The show lacks a sense of purpose and passion, as if the dancers are too familiar with it.

The staging remains strong throughout, from an early scene portraying tango's less glamorous social origins danced in slums in front of corrugated-iron housing. It's a tawdry but authentic start and includes some nicely constructed choreography patterns, where one couple starts and is joined by a second, third and fourth before the whole cast is dancing as one unit.

Things get altogether more risqué as we enter the red light district - it's dark and dingy, hinting at the unknown dangers Giselle will face. The costumes are naturally more daring than those seen early, full of fringing and a dash of sparkle. The choreography loses the casual nature as dancers hang lustily off each other in a series of urgent lifts, kicks and lunges before cooling off. It's the best set-piece of the show.

For all the cliché of the lead characters, I enjoyed Celatti's take on Giselle. She never loses her innocence as she is thrown from scene to scene and expected to cope, and her dancing has a likeable vulnerability. In the final dance she shares with Lorenzo, she possesses a Bambi quality; despite the athletic choreography she is still fragile and seeks the protection he can provide.

In contrast, the roles of the male protagonists felt quite one-dimensional. There is plenty of blokey bravado in the lead up to their final face-off, if you like that sort of thing...

For all its flaws, however, *Tanguera* is admirably concise at just one hour and 20 minutes. It's just a shame that the dancers only truly come alive and shed all inhibition in the extended curtain call that, ironically, is simply a showcase of their best moves. One can't help but think this unoriginal narrative needs to be lost altogether to get the best from the talented cast.

***Tanguera* at Sadler's Wells until 6 August**

Image credit: Alex Rumford