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## **Reviving a golden age, a few steps at a time**

By René Hill

Tango, like many Latin American dances, has taken the world by storm.

People are slipping their feet into their dancing shoes, putting one foot in front or behind each other and tearing up dance floors across the globe.

One such group is BermudaSalsa.com which is hosting 2007 March Mambo Nights: Colours of Tango tonight and tomorrow night in the Mid Ocean Amphitheatre of the Fairmont Southampton.

Travis Gilbert, co-director of the Sabor Dance School, said this will be a dynamic off-Broadway performance of Argentinean Tango, produced by Angel G. Clemente and the Tango Y Mas Dance Company of New York.

“Colours of Tango is a seamless theatrical account of the many influences and interpretations of Argentinean tango that held its first breaths within the passionate cities of Argentina and has grown to personify that essential embrace that defines the best of who we are and allows us to exhale,” he said.

The dance grew out of 19th century Buenos Aires — a booming port town filled with immigrants. Most of the immigrants were men, often homesick and seeking distraction in the city’s bars, gambling houses and brothels.

“It was here that a very intimate dance emerged, cheek-to-cheek and chest-to-chest,” added Mr. Gilbert.

“Due to the shortage of women, men would practice their steps with other men, with a view to impressing a woman and preparing for that rare moment in which they would be able to hold her in their arms.”

But unlike today, at that time, the tango was considered socially unacceptable by decent Buenos Aires society folk. But young men from prosperous families would visit the brothels and it was here that they learned to dance the tango.

“By the end of the first decade of the 20th Century, Argentina had become the world’s seventh richest nation,” Mr. Gilbert said. “And it had become fashionable for wealthy families to send their sons to Europe to finish their education.

“When these young men demonstrated their dancing skills in Parisian high society, the tango became a world-wide craze.

“With tango all the rage in Paris and around the world, it was finally embraced by mainstream Buenos Aires society. In the 1920s, classically trained musicians from Buenos Aires became interested in tango and started to take the genre into a more formal musical framework.

“Meanwhile, the tango cancion (song) started to become a subculture of the tango world in its own right and singer Carlos Gardel became a national hero.

“The 1930s marked the beginning of the Golden Age of Tango during which time Buenos Aires witnessed a creative explosion of composers, lyricists, singers and musicians, and the dance became one of the most beautiful social dances ever seen.”

Hollywood heartthrobs such as Rudolf Valentino, made the tango a hit with his theatrical tango in the film ‘The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse’, while Al Pacino and Gabrielle Anwar brought forth one of the most sensitive tango scenes in ‘Scent of a Woman’.

The dance, however, was considered to be highly risqué and was adapted so that it involved less body contact.

“From this emerged what we today know as Tango Americano or ballroom tango, which is now a distinct dance form from Argentinean tango,” he said. Following the Second World War, Argentina started to become politically isolated from the rest of the world. By the 1960s, Rock ‘n’ Roll eclipsed all other popular music world-wide, while Argentina fell to a military dictatorship,” Mr. Gilbert said.

“Despite laws forbidding groups of more than three to gather, the tango did not die.”

In the 1970s musician and composer, Astor Piazzolla, became internationally famous for his innovative style of tango music which drew on classical and jazz influences.

“A new genre, Buenos Tango, was born, which despite being criticised by many for breaking with tradition, has enjoyed huge international success.

“By the 1980s, the tango, as a dance form, was revived for the stage with big shows such as the Broadway hit ‘Tango Argentino’ and audiences around the world became familiar with a theatricalised version of the dance.

“A split developed between the stage style and the close-hold style danced in Buenos Aires milongas or dance halls by people for whom tango is a way of life.

“Today tango is experiencing a revival amongst all ages around the world. A new generation is taking up the tango, and in Buenos Aires people are dancing tango until the early hours of the morning, every night of the week.”

So with this in mind, the BermudaSalsa.com Group considers it an honour to bring this Latin dance showcase to the Island.

“It will further display our commitment to producing high quality Latin entertainment packages,” he said.

“This showcase is also aimed to invigorate the Latin dance programme at the Sabor Dance School to ensure broad exposure to its emerging tango programme.

“And local dancers from the Sabor Dance Company will share the stage with a star-studded cast of international guests.

“Bermuda will be represented by the director of the Sabor Dance School Angela Hayward, myself, her partner, and the Minister of Social Rehabilitation, Dale Butler.”

Doors open at 8 p.m. and show time is at 8.30 p.m.

Tickets, \$55 for general seating, and \$70 priority table seating, which includes a complementary cocktail and light appetisers. Tickets can be purchased at the Lemon Tree, Portofino Pizza Restaurant, Music World and the Sabor Dance School, at Bermuda College.

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