

Tango

In *Tango*, Spanish director Carlos Saura takes on Argentine tango, with simmering dance sequences surrounded by a contemporary Buenos Aires. The film's scenario presents theatrical director Mario Suarez (Miguel Angel Sola), on the rebound after losing his dancer wife Laura (Cecilia Narova) and having to take on the girlfriend Elena (Mia Maestro) of a shady gangster who is willing to finance Mario's latest show on the history of tango. Then the director becomes enamored of Elena, which threatens the relationship with his benefactor.

The story, however, is a mere wisp that floats in and around the numerous virtuoso displays of the dance itself, and the tango sequences are the reason to see the film (nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film this year--1998).

Filmed in Buenos Aires, *Tango* opens with a long, lingering panorama of the port, hinting at more local color to come. But it never does, as director Saura, maker of such eminent dance films as *Blood Wedding* and *Carmen*, concentrates his filmmaking in a hangar-sized set outside Buenos Aires, the better to take advantage of the lighting and camera wizardry of cinematographer Vittorio Storaro (a three-time Oscar winner). Such studio settings offer Saura and Storaro the kind of control over dance images they achieved in 1996's *Flamenco*, another collaboration, but one which dispenses altogether with story to focus on dance and music. The images they achieve, backed impressively by the music of Lalo Schifrin, are impeccable, and as simultaneously sinister, cocky, and elegant as tango itself.

This film's dancing may appear different to people used to the ubiquitous tango shows that have been touring the States during the last few years. The dancing in *Tango* is less flashy, less showbiz, more tightly controlled and suave--and the more erotically charged because of it. The two young female leads are striking, and Argentine ballet dancer Julio Bocca (from the American Ballet Theatre) does a star turn, but the real master of this special dance universe is veteran *tanguista* Juan Carlos Copes, who shows his highly coiled power to superb effect.

("Tango" contains nothing objectionable.)

(April 1999)