

# Sensual Spanish Accent Arrives by Way of Quebec

By [CLAUDIA LA ROCCO](#)

Lots of shows do their best to break down the fourth wall, but tango productions tend to rely on it. There the audience members are, seated demurely in their rows of chairs, while on stage the dancers and musicians, dressed to the glittery nines, evoke sultry encounters in romantic, far-flung locales. The whole point is to be transported to another place.

It's no easy feat, especially at Town Hall, where the abysmal orchestra sightlines and intrusive late-seating policy continually serve to remind viewers that they're nowhere near a Buenos Aires nightclub. That any transportation at all happened at Friday night's "Tangos From Gardel to Piazzolla" was due to the strong effort of the [Romulo Larrea Tango Ensemble](#).

Social dance can easily congeal on the concert stage, and perhaps because of this, artists involved in such endeavors often gild the lily so that the more subtle elements of their traditions tip into caricature and cliché. Think, for instance, of the overemoting flamenco diva, or the tango couple whose every lift seems designed as a candidate for the dance hall version of the Kama Sutra.

Not so with this Quebec ensemble. Led by Mr. Larrea on bandoneón, the musicians consistently played up the wit and teased out the more ambiguous elements of their material, with the singer [Verónica Larc](#) joining them every few songs for an extra infusion of earthy sensuality. Mr. Larrea added occasional commentary on his love for Gardel and Piazzolla, which, while charming, was unnecessary. The musicians' feeling and respect was woven into every note, while the pianist Louise-Andrée Baril was a particularly delightful presence.

The dancing, meanwhile, built much of its erotic charge through restraint. This is, after all, an art in which two steps forward and one step back isn't progress but foreplay. The most severe and fiery of the three couples were Leah Barsky and Carlos Cañedo. (Who knew the man could smile till the final curtain call?) Their legs sliced wickedly through turns and kicks like whirring blades, and they maintained gorgeous control while plunging into deep, aggressive lunges.

Mariana Parma and Hernán Brizuela were far more reserved; you got the feeling that the major battles between these two had been settled. That absence of high drama allowed for elements of line and rhythm to come fully to the fore. Mr. Brizuela, in particular, held impeccable lines as Ms. Parma's limbs licked around his frame.

The sharpest moment of drama came when Walter Perez's smoothly shuffling toe caught the hem of Mariana Galassi's skirt, threatening for a moment to create an unscripted sartorial scene. The fabric stretched, and the crowd gasped. But the show went suavely on.



Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times  
RECOMMEND

**Romulo Larrea Tango Ensemble** This group's Leah Barsky and Carlos Cañedo in a performance at Town Hall.

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