

Dance film waltzes its way through story

By Robert McGuire
Staff Writer

The promotional literature for the film "The Tango Lesson" calls it a "Dirty Dancing" for intellectuals. But a more apt comparison might be to action adventure movies.

There are no explosions, sinking ships or motorcycle chases with the heroes perilously handcuffed to each other, but there is suspense sustained over long minutes, pulling the viewer to the edge of the seat to watch closer, gasp and often laugh with



Sally Potter takes tango lessons from professional dancer Pablo Veron.

surprise.

Director Sally Potter shows how talented bodies in motion can be the best special effect of all. Gorgeously choreographed and photographed, "The Tango Lesson" evokes the golden era of film with an hour-and-a-half of breathtaking dance.



The characters in the film are real and use their own names. Potter plays a movie maker taking lessons from professional dancer Pablo Veron, one of Argentina's most revered dancers.

She learns slowly at first, but soon they dance everywhere. They dance with their surroundings, making dishtowels and heads of lettuce come to life. They dance on giant ornate mantelpieces, in cafes and in the rain. They beautifully dance on the sidewalks along the River Seine in Paris on a foggy night, evoking so many other beautiful shots in other movies on that same sidewalk.

They creatively dance with luggage carts and along moving airport sidewalks, leading to possibly the most whimsical goodbye kiss in the history of film.

Writing and directing the film, acting and dancing in it and writing and performing the soundtrack, Potter does it all

to put on an incredibly gentle and moving piece of cinema.

Some viewers may balk at the apparent lack of plot, but a little intellectualizing goes a long way here.

The character Sally travels to Hollywood to peddle a script that she has lost the heart to write — and that producers want to ruin for the sake of ticket sales anyway. At this point, audiences learn that the story is about the difficulty of coming up with a story for a movie.

It's not terribly insightful, but it's enough to hang the photography on.

We meet Sally in London working fitfully on an angry and violently disturbing script and then traveling to Paris to clear her head. There, she becomes completely distracted from her "serious" work by an awakening passion for tango.

She abandons the script and decides she might make a movie about tango with Pablo the star, if he teaches her to dance.

She learns to dance beautifully, but their professional and touch-and-go romantic relationship begins to unravel. He thinks she is using him and will never make a movie about him. She thinks he is so accustomed to leading that he will never let her direct him.

Through it all, the story falls away in a wash of visual spectacle and humor that is completely satisfying.

"The Tango Lesson" is rated PG and will open at the Downer Theatre, 2589 N. Downer, Jan. 30.

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