

Dancing the Argentine Nights Away

By VINCENT CANBY

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Review/**Film**

Dancing the Argentine Nights Away

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"Naked Tango," the first film to be directed as well as written by Leonard Schrader, attempts to illustrate and make dramatic the gaudy background of the dance that came out of the multi-ethnic Buenos Aires underworld in the 1920's.

It's about the obsessive sadomasochistic love of Stephanie (Mathilda May), the pampered French wife of a much older Argentine judge (Fernando Rey), and Cholo (Vincent D'Onofrio), the handsome young gangster who makes her his dance slave.

Cholo, a pimp by profession, has no interest in sex. He just likes to dance, dance, dance. For him the tango is better than sex, and so private that he blindfolds the three-man combo that plays for him. Sometimes he even blindfolds his female partner.

Cholo and Stephanie had met when she became a prisoner in his bordello by a route too circuitous to mention. Something about Stephanie attracted Cholo. It could have been her Louise Brooks haircut, possibly the manacles she sometimes wore. In any case, the attraction was instant and kinky.

Cholo and Stephanie dance and dance. Once, when they are tangoing, Stephanie is not wearing clothes, which helps to give the movie its title.

Naked Tango

Directed and written by Leonard Schrader, inspired by Manuel Puig; director of photography, Juan Ruiz-Anchia; edited by Debra McDermott and Lee Percy; choreography by Carlos Rivarola; music by Thomas Newman; production designer, Anthony Pratt; produced by David W. Eisman; released by New Line Cinema. At Cinema 2, Third Avenue and 60th Street, Manhattan. Running time: 90 minutes. This film is rated R.

Cholo.....	Vincent D'Onofrio
Alba/Stephanie.....	Mathilda May
Zico Borenstein.....	Esai Morales
Judge Torres.....	Fernando Rey
Zico's Mama.....	Cope Lincovski

Another time each holds a dagger under the other's chin. They while away another night tangoing in a bloody but otherwise empty abattoir. They don't make love until the night they witness a murder. Cholo is so turned on that he beds Stephanie in the front seat of a car. She is lying on broken glass and couldn't be more pleased.

In this way the movie lurches on, with a humorlessness that the audience is not likely to share. It's difficult to keep a straight face when Cholo says to Stephanie with total sincerity: "Don't worry. I'll never let anyone else kill you."

Stephanie has some zingers of her own. When she wakes up in the bor-

dello, having been kidnapped and put in chains, the first question that pops into her pretty little head is, "What time is it?"

The actors remain solemn and grim throughout. The film isn't really preposterous, just unrealized. Mr. Schrader, who has written some very good screenplays ("Kiss of the Spider Woman"), doesn't seem to have any idea of how to make such crazy, heedless love comprehensible in film terms.

He doesn't even present the tango in a way to suggest the primal passions contained within the music and the movement. There are lots of shots of feet, which may be designed for shoe fetishists, but not enough of the lovers dancing in full figure.

There are some stylish period sets, and a lot of stark lighting intended to recall the Expressionism of German films of the 1920's, though on color film stock. Nothing works, except Thomas Newman's musical score.

"Naked Tango," which opens today at Cinema 2, is said to have been inspired by Manuel Puig, the Argentine novelist and author of "Kiss of

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microfilm.

Sugarloaf/Gotan Productions

Vincent D'Onofrio

the Spider Woman." It was produced in Buenos Aires, in English, with international financing and an international cast. It possesses no character whatsoever.

"Naked Tango" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). It includes violence, partial nudity and simulated sex.