BECKET -- If you think you know Argentine Tango from the ballroom struts of "Dancing with the Stars," or cellist YoYo Ma’s best-selling "Tango" album, you’re in for a sense-opening experience at the Pillow’s Ted Shawn Theater this week.

No, it’s not just intricate footwork, fishnet stockings, swooning dips, and Latino sizzle. **Tango superstar and choreographer Natalie Hills, has embodied the whole history of this specifically Argentine genre in dance and the music that indelibly informs it.** Indeed, much of the evening’s magic is the ensemble of musicians gathered onstage, masters of both gracious interplay and instrumental excellence on piano, violin, contrabass, cello, guitar, and "bandoneon" (accordion or German concertina).

**Happily, the program gives equal due to both dancers and musicians.** It spills across the stage gathering power as its title, "Romper el Piso" ("break the floor") would suggest, but also deep with subtle nuance.

Reduced to its simplest formulae, tango works a clear 4/4 beat. Against this pulsing tapestry, the dancers engage each other in partnership, essentially, to "walk" the music together.

In one sense, it’s as formal as a Saturday evening stroll around a plaza fountain in the shadow of the Church, boys and girls making eyes at each other while duenas hold them in check. Under the benign surface, hearts and hormones are eager, restless, yearning. But at the end of the evening, the plaza empties, each walks back into the light of day. **The music expresses the full range of the human experience -- youth, passion, pride, nostalgia, lost hopes and resignation, not to mention the complex social mores of an immigrant nation with Spanish, African and European origins.**

It falls to the dancers tell the stories, expressing the music’s intention through touch, footwork, speed and stillness.

This is not a simple formula. Their knees and ankles brush lightly; their feet trip delicately about each other’s, mindful of dangerous entanglements; they flick their legs like tongues teasing arousal; they embroider their steps with improvisational turns and counterturns, figure-eights, crosses and tempo changes to create suspense and deflect expectation.

**It’s kind of heart-stopping to watch each dancer riding an edge; competing fiercely for skill and seduction advantage, even intermittently, yielding to submission.** Yet not. The whole dance is a "come-hither" thing, executed in unison, unmercifully interdependent on the music and each other. Just doing it requires ongoing testing and the build-up of trust between them, yet, they cling to individuality for dear life, with no expectation delivery of "results.**
The thrill houses fear of what interdependence might bring at the end of the dance. Who knows whether this agile, musical, articulate Tanguero carries a knife or stiletto? Yet, who can resist the joy of spontaneous, interactive partnering?

In the Argentine tradition, partnering may be at arms length or chest-to-chest, but the latter is more predominant.

"En el Abrazo," ("in the embrace") is a concept that engendered a whole tango style in the 1940s and ‘50s. Unlike later Western ballroom tango, hip and pelvic connection is not characteristic.

Argentinean females court notice with their partners through soft upper body advantage; and, also with their observers, who admire the play of their arching hips, swaying with sensuous pulsing. Man and woman hold their heads close together, the female sometimes tendering a cheek to the man’s shoulder, even if her facial expression looks aloof or internally preoccupied with chasing skill.

It’s this fascinating tension between restraint, and the pitch and toss of human emotion embodied in the both music and partnering that makes Argentine tango dig so much deeper than ballroom versions.

Partnering, collaboration if you will, is all. Its demands automatically demand extreme mindfulness as well as losing oneself to the passions of the human heart.

Ultimately, this is the existential dilemma -- how to live in the human community, alone and together. In life, the social contract must govern hopes and dreams. In art, they can be both disciplined and let rip.