

## DANCE REVIEW

## As if the living move among the dead

Ghostly bodies reach out from the past in a deft, imaginative piece from Heidi Duckler.

By LEWIS SEGAL  
Times Staff Writer

"In the old neighborhoods the ghosts are rising. . . ."

Narrator Richard Azurdia stands on the stage of the Casa del Mexicano, a community center in Boyle Heights, speaking of angels, the spirits of the dead and the impermanence of all things.

It's the Thursday premiere of "The Entire World Is a Narrow Bridge," and though ghosts and a sense of impermanence are familiar enough in the site-specific repertory of Heidi Duckler's locally based Collage Dance Theatre, this company vehicle is unusual.

In the last 20 years, Duckler has most often chosen sites with specific functions: a jail, a hotel, a newspaper building, a celebrity restaurant. But nobody is sure

exactly what the Casa del Mexicano was created to be.

Built early in the 20th century, this high-domed, balconied relic has reportedly served as a church, a synagogue and the property of the Mexican consulate — but mysteries remain, and those mysteries inspire Duckler and her key collaborators: Merri-dawn Duckler (text) and Robert Een (music).

In overlapping evocations of previous tenants and their cultures, Hassidic figures in black prowl the space, sometimes climbing the long rope bridge stretching from the front balcony down to the stage floor. Folklorico dancers detonate percussive footwork. Masked wrestlers fake epic battles. A skeleton-hostess passes out cookies. Beauty queens parade and the music of roaming mariachis mixes with the mournful accompaniment that Een's chamber ensemble provides.

Some of the local community's most distinctive contemporary dancers turn up in unlikely roles — tiny Marissa LaBog and skinny Chris Stanley,

## 'The Entire World Is a Narrow Bridge'

**Where:** Casa del Mexicano, 2900 Calle Pedro Infante (near 4th Street and Euclid Avenue), Boyle Heights

**When:** This weekend and Oct. 20-23; 7 p.m. Thursdays and Sundays; 7 and 9 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays

**Ends:** Oct. 23

**Price:** \$40

**Contact:** (818) 784-8669 or [www.collagedancetheatre.org](http://www.collagedancetheatre.org)

for instance — though Lillian Bitkoff stays in the spotlight the longest as an elusive figure who becomes Azurdia's angelic muse.

Suddenly Duckler and designer Habib Kheradyar stage a *coup de théâtre*, covering the rope bridge in rippling fabric to divide the room in half and launch the piece's most elaborate spectral choreography.

As dancers approach the

sides of the curtained bridge, unseen figures inside reach out to grab them and swallow them up in fabric, sometimes lifting them first, sometimes drawing the fabric tightly across their own faces to form a fleeting sculptural image.

Bold and imaginative, the sequence physicalizes the dead's hold on the living, the past on the present, long-gone inhabitants on our sense of a place. And it might have served Duckler equally well at the Coconut Grove, the Herald-Examiner or Perino's.

It defines her chosen mission as an artist — to recapture in dance the energies that once existed in an environment and show them swirling around us like phantoms as we walk from room to room.

At barely an hour, "The Entire World Is a Narrow Bridge" can't begin to explore every theme that it introduces, but it does effectively remind us of how soon we'll all be on the dark side of that mystery-curtain. For Duckler, every day is the Day of the Dead.