

Day of the Dead haunts train

> BY DEENA COX

Thanks to a generation of health- and safety-conscious parents, kids just aren't trick-or-treating like they used to. For most households, long gone are the days of doorbells ringing nonstop from early until late on October 31; heading out dressed as ghouls, ghosts, and princesses to collect pillowcases full of sugary treats is not on the Halloween agenda for many children.

For families craving an alternative experience, the Stanley Park Halloween Ghost Train (which chugs along from tomorrow [October 7] through to November 2) blends the twisted creative vision of the Mortal Coil Performance Society with well-researched, historically and culturally based artistic and performance installations along the park's train route.

This year, the minds at Mortal Coil, the team responsible for the past five installments, are drawn to the Central American homage to the dearly departed, the Day of the Dead. More upbeat and festive than the morbid traditions associated with Halloween, the Day of the Dead is a celebration of spirits that goes back at least 3,000 years to the region's indigenous peoples.

"We try to work with a few different levels, so that it's entertaining for children as well as adults," explains Carrie Nimmo, Mortal Coil's artistic director, calling from a Ghost Train rehearsal. "There are scarier elements, there's humour, there's what we recognize as Halloween—which might be the skulls and the devils, but there's also a rich cultural tradition that we've been inspired by too, so it's a lot brighter than what we'd usually see at Halloween."

Inspired by her and fellow creative-team member Marina Szijarto's earlier involvement with the Public Dreams Society's similarly themed Parade



The Mortal Coil Performance Society drew on Mexico's Day of the Dead, and pulled a few skeletons out of the closet, for its latest park installation.

of the lost Souls in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood—which has been cancelled this year while its artists rework the event for 2006—Nimmo and crew have been drawn to the colourful, celebratory rituals of the Day of the Dead for years. For Mortal Coil, the devil is in the details.

With turquoise-, pink-, red-, and gold-clad mischievous sprites, skeletal dogs and swans, a corpse bride flying through the dense Stanley Park forest on a zip line, fire-wielding iguanas, and stilt-walking Frida Kahlo skeletons, this year's Ghost Train (which runs from 6 to 9 p.m. nightly) is a 14-minute journey through the Day of the Dead. The train plaza will be transformed into a festive open-air market with a cantina for refreshments, and face-painting, farmyard animals, and mask-making workshops led by artists from Mortal

Coil will add to the Mexican-themed event. For the more adventurous, starting at 7 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, the Stanley Park Ecology Society will lead candle-lit tours of the surrounding woods in search of bugs, bats, and other creatures of the night. The success of Ghost Train is rooted in its unique location, its variety of activities, and its universal appeal, regardless of age.

"It's visual, it moves, you're going on a journey," says Nimmo. "You get the dark woods, which can be scary, and then you come across these surprises, which might frighten you a little bit at first, but then you find the story in the scene and the humour and it becomes a very rich event that an adult will love. You'll feel like a kid riding again on the miniature train."

For more information, visit www.vancouverparks.ca. ♦



International Arts Initiatives and Chan Centre for the Performing Arts
in association with LIVE Biennial of Performance Art

**Astrid Hadad
y Los Tarzanes**
**Chan Centre
at UBC**

**Saturday
October 22
8pm**

ticketmaster.ca

604.280.3311

Or at the
Chan Ticket Office
(in person only)

direct from Mexico City

"Outrageously
funny...
like a
Frida Kahlo
painting
come to life"

SFGate

straight

mundomundo.com