

DAILY BREEZE

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Herald Examiner Building

Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Dance company invades former Hearst publishing palace! No doubt about it. Heidi Duckler and her Collage Dance Theatre are a Los Angeles treasure. Her site-specific multimedia performances combine history and cultural commentary in a way that takes audiences on an eye-opening odyssey. In the past, Duckler and company have plunged into the Los Angeles River, explored the catacombs of the Subway Terminal Building, taken up residence in a high school locker room, an abandoned gas station and a glamorous hotel. Duckler's latest piece of dance as history, architecture and social anthropology is called "Cover Story." Its focus is our news-hungry society. And its exceedingly appropriate, ghostly setting is the Herald Examiner Building in downtown Los Angeles, where for 75 years, under the regency of William Randolph Hearst, the paper poured out the daily news. It's "All the President's Men" and "West Side Story."

The piece begins in architect Julia Morgan's ornate Beaux Arts lobby, (she of Hearst Castle fame), as a pair of tap dancers, John Kloss and Bob Carroll (Misters "Q" & "A") clickety-clack up and down the grand staircases like performers in a Hollywood musical.



Then singer/storyteller Victoria Burnett begins a chant that becomes the show's media mantra, "We gotta know. We gotta know. We gotta know how the story ends." From the lobby the audience is escorted into a bustling newsroom where a bevy of desk-leaping, file-slamming, paper-pushing reporters perform a frantic ballet of breaking news. A rather contrived interruption turns the newsroom into a crime scene that casts the audience in the role of newsmakers. Perhaps we're all in for our 15 minutes of fame? Evacuated from the crime scene, Duckler's magical mystery tour winds its way up and down staircases lined with blaring headlines and past empty offices.

Along the way there are also two sets (a police precinct house and an emergency room) currently in use as film locations. Duckler takes them over. And in a spoof of the popular medical series, a moaning woman goes into labor, only to deliver a television set as her offspring. "It's 19 inches!" declares the doctor. "Cover Story's" final, and most compelling scenes, take place in the depths of the building, in the vast chamber that once held the presses. On an elevated platform a peeping Tom tabloid hound is caught spying on a couple in the midst of a bedroom tryst. Shouting "I didn't see anything," she is chased away along girders and catwalks, eventually making an escape worthy of Spider-Man on an overhead trolley that slides and creaks the length of the massive room. The space is lined with television monitors that present a glowing pastiche of news flashes, car chases and gloss.