

Weekend Pass

Entertainment - October 27, 2005

Follow That Ghost

A local tour company brings dead locals to life all over town

OUT & ABOUT: We've been on a lot of ghost tours, and it's a fact that the right tour guide makes or breaks a nighttime spin around any city's haunted places. There was the nice older gentleman who preceded a tour firmly insisting that there's no such thing as ghosts as a flurry of bats swarmed overhead in the twilight, insisting otherwise. Then there was the puckish guy in Charleston, S.C., who pointed out engravings of John C. Calhoun on Confederate bills and then whispered, "Let's go meet him." And we did, at the old firebrand's grave. Brrrr.

Then there are Natalie Zanin's Historic Strolls, in which a cast of actors puts on costumes, gets into character and turns the city of Washington into a stage. Consider that one of her guides in disguise almost got hauled in by the FBI, whose building he was furtively hanging in front of. "They thought he was a suspicious person in disguise. I thought I had done a really good job with the costume, but apparently not. And they wanted his Social Security and everything. I was watching him and I thought, 'He's really in the moment, he's nervous ... playing Andrew Carnegie.' So that was a new one for us."

The Bad Olde Days tour (also known as Gangs of Washington), the Civil War tour, the Charles Dickens tour are all popular, but the one that attracts the most huddled, expectant crowds is the Ghost Story Tour of Washington. "We walk around Lafayette Square," said Zanin "and stop in front of the haunted structures. The ghosts will be there and I wrote little scenes for them based on their tragic life experiences." It's not just about chills and thrills, Zanin said. To know a human is to know a ghost. "That way, you can understand why this ghost is haunting the Hay Adams Hotel and think, 'Oh, All right, I would haunt for that reason.'" We're sure the bats would agree.

ARION BERGER (EXPRESS)

Meet at McPherson Square, White House exit; Sat., 6 & 8p.m., children's tour 2p.m.; adults \$10, children \$5; 301-588-9255 or historicstrolls.com.



IN THE MOMENT: A confrontation with the supernatural during the Dickens tour.