You're surrounded by 75 other people, walking along a path under darkening summer evening skies, engrossed in not only the rural landscape enveloping you, but also wondrous illusions of people in trees, of brightly colored South American houses with tin roofs, and of pulsing music everywhere.

Musicians suddenly surround you — accordions, drums, guitars. Spontaneously, the plaza erupts in wild dancing, you too, are dancing without a care.

This is the magic of “Cada Luna Azul,” the “Once a Blue Moon” summer spectacle of Ashfield's Double Edge Theatre, which runs Wednesdays through Sundays, through Aug. 22.

That magic becomes palpable, with an ensemble cast of 30 that suggests 300 because the actors, musicians and dancers are seemingly everywhere around Double Edge's sprawling grounds — yes, that includes in the trees — and because the audience becomes part of the Argentine village and its surroundings.

The performance follows a traveler (played by Carlos Uriona) who returns to his hometown of Agua Santa after many years, where he recalls his past and the stories of the colorful townspeople.

“Cada Luna Azul” was first presented last summer in Ashfield for sell-out audiences totaling about 2,000 — and again recently in Boston’s Jamaica Plain section.

There are plans for a production in Springfield’s Forest Park in September.

Muzzling artists

Although the theater piece is inspired by written texts, including Isabel Allende's “Stories of Eva Luna” and Alejandro Jodorowfsky's “Where the Bird Sings Best,” the script by Double Edge co-artistic director Matthew Glassman draws heavily from the experiences of Uriona, the actor who plays the central character.
Before emigrating to this country in 1995, Uriona founded the award-winning puppet theatre Diablomundo, named one of the “Top Ten Most Important Argentine Theatres of the 20th century” by the Association of Argentinean Critics. He co-created and performed in more than 15 original works and adaptations with the company, which toured internationally.

He also organized groups of self-managed actors and artist cooperatives to combat repression during Argentina's military dictatorship, which lasted from 1976 to 1982.

Outdoor communal artistic expression — Mardi Gras, circus-theater, tango and rock ’n’ roll — were banned in Argentina in the 1970s, but Uriona remembers when it started creeping back onto the streets.

“We started slowly to do things outdoors again, as the military started losing its grip,” he said. “By the end of the regime, we aggressively assaulted the plaza, reinstituting parades and circus training with thousands of people coming.”

That movement, he says, was part of the preparations for asserting the popular will of the people, and preparing for democracy.

**Breaking boundaries**

That history led to the concept of “Cada Luna Azul,” says Stacy Klein, the founder of Double Edge Theatre.

“We wanted to explore (Uriona’s) history and his work in the plazas,” Klein said, as well as exploring in-depth those street celebrations that are part of people's engagement in Latin American culture along with its political strife.

For Double Edge, which has been creating summer spectacles since 2003, merging theater, movement, music and the open landscape, tapping into Latin America’s popular involvement in celebrations and demonstrations was a natural.

“As we've been doing spectacles, we've been been getting closer and closer to the audience,” Klein said. “In carnival, you're with the audience. We wanted to break the boundaries completely.”

Without giving up its professional standards, and without actually organizing around a political message, she says, Double Edge was looking at how the people in Latin-America are engaged in communities.

“(There) people become engaged when they're outside on the streets. We don't have those traditions, we don't have that music,” she said. “Everybody's not singing the same song. We wanted to take it further.”
Klein says she wanted to portray the actual process of the work, and how people are engaged in it, but, at the same time, she added, “We didn't want to compromise our art. We wanted to make sure it was magical, that people were turned around, that they didn't know where they were. They could really have that experience where they're elevated beyond their daily life.”

Drawn in by the work's magical realism, incorporating elements ranging from magnificent murals and hand painted sets to outlandish acrobatics set against the surreal nighttime darkness, this year's production aims to engage audiences in the spectacle, dancing to Uruguayan candombe, Bolivian says, and of course Argentine tango rhythms.

“We really want to enliven engagement,” Klein said. “This performance is about everything. It’s not like we’re making a performance about the coup in Argentina and martial law and Donald Trump.”

**Come together**

As Double Edge ended its 2009-2014, “Chagall cycle” with outdoor spectacles like, “The Odyssey” and “The Firebird,” Klein says, organizers wanted to express the value of togetherness.

“We were thinking, hate is getting a lot of attention,” she said. “We want to do something that shows the reality is we are dancing together. We are together, and it’s a very special thing.”

Bringing together artists and craftspeople, around the former dairy farm, and reaching out to the larger community with performances in the schools, is part of Double Edge’s larger vision, while also using the land to grow food for its performers.

Told through the connecting thread of the memory of Uriona’s character, “Cada Luna Azul” reveals stories of the village and the people in it.

**The power of tango**

And each performance stirs memories for Uriona himself.

“The nostalgia, the pain you feel for the place. ... There’s a lot of regret for what I haven’t done, what I wanted to do,” he said.

The play is evocative, too, being steeped each evening in tango, a musical form Uriona says he resisted when, as a young person, he was more drawn to rock ’n’ roll. But now, he says, it evokes the raw emotional power of its urban popularity.

Yet, Klein says, you don’t need to have lived in Latin America to be carried away by the spectacle, given the production’s magical realism.

“It’s seeing the ordinary in a magical way,” she said. “That's pretty much how Carlos (Uriona) sees life, so it was very joyful to finally get that onstage.”