

Shaner on the Arts

★ **"The Rhythm of Torn Stars."** Conceived and directed by Julian Neil, this stunning production features the works of New York poets Barbara Barg, Ted Berrigan, Jim Carroll, Sandie Castle, Lucky Cienfuegos, Maggie Dubris, Michael Lally, Elinor Nauen, Frank O'Hara, Miguel Pinero and Ed Sanders. Neil has taken individual poems and fragments and patch-stitched them into a wonderful dramatic quilt of a play that echoes to the rhythms of New York's back street blues. The poems themselves have suggested the loose story line and, with the help of some swell actors, what results is visually dramatic, aurally satisfying, emotionally stirring and, surprising, inspiring in that you can't wait to go read more of these poets' works. Actors Tate Donovan, Meg Foster, M.K. Harris, Michael Lally, Mimi Lieber, Perri Lister, Maura Tierney and Michael Tulin are all incredibly good—Tierney and Harris well beyond that. Where the poet leaves off and the actor begins becomes blurred, but the fusion of the art forms, along with some "cool" music by Robert Thiele, Tim Serra and J.C. Gomez, works its magic for an unusual and resonant evening of theater. (The Pink, 2810 Main St., Santa Monica. Wednesday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sunday at 7 p.m. Through July 2. 213/466-1767. By the way, The Pink is an upscale (?) nightclub with a full bar.)

★

★ **"Gloria Duplex: An Erotic Worship Service for Theatre,"** by Rebecca Wells, directed by Teri Ralston. Set in a wonderfully tacky-tacky New Orleans bar, the Kitten Paradise Temple and Lounge, designed down to the runway in the shape of a cross by Deborah Raymond and Dorian Vernaccio, "Gloria" tells the unlikely story of a down-at-the-heels exotic dancer (Brenda Thomson) who has seen the light, literally, and conducts evangelical worship services as she bumps and grinds. A raunchy mixture of sleaze, crudity and fundamentalism, the stage antics include accomplished dancing and singing by Thomson, Jean Hubbard Boone, Gregg Henry and Rhoda Gemignani. Meanwhile, the playwright's attention wanders unfettered through long, boring, vulgar stories and audience sing-alongs with the self-congratulatory group on stage who love each other to death. The second or third time the stripper breaks down and pounds the stage in self-induced despair, we begin to wish we could all have a drink and go home. Not sexy, stirring or terribly original, there's less here than meets the eye. (Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys. Wednesday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sunday at 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Be there early for a tour of the "Kitten Paradise." Post-performance discussions on Thursdays. Through Aug. 13. 818/780-2240.)

Madeleine Shaner is the author of this exclusive report.