

Teri Ralston's double-entendre

Busy actress-director commutes from the romantic to the raunchy

By TOM JACOBS
Daily News Theater Writer

You can't help but notice it as you walk into Teri Ralston's Studio City home. Sitting on a stereo

speaker not far from her living room door is a stack of newspapers.

About three weeks worth of newspapers.

Unopened.

"Does this say something about my life?" the veteran actress and director asked with a laugh.

Ralston hasn't had time to read the newspaper or do much of anything else for the past few weeks. She has been attending two sets of rehearsals at the same time — one in Van Nuys, the other in Costa Mesa.

She is appearing in Stephen Sondheim's "Sunday in the Park With George," which opens Thursday night at South Coast Repertory. And she is directing Rebecca Wells' "Gloria Duplex," which opens Sunday at the Back Alley Theatre.

Why would she agree to such a schedule, which is keeping her either on the road or at the theater from 9 a.m. until midnight daily? The short answer is that the accomplished performer — she was in the original Broadway casts of both "Company" and "A Little Night Music" — couldn't turn down either show.

Now for the long answer, which came in sort of a headlong rush. Ralston actually had time to relax the morning of the inter-



"I definitely wanted to be a part of it ("Gloria Duplex"), says the play's director, Teri Ralston, "because I love the show so much, because I love South Coast so much."

view — she didn't have to be in Orange County until 3 p.m. — but she was still operating on overdrive.

"Laura Zucker and Allan Miller (the Back Alley's producing directors) had seen a production of "The Octet Bridge Club," which I directed (at the West End Playhouse in 1987)," she said. "They had been asking me to direct things there ever since, but I haven't been available.

"Laura called me in Hawaii and said, 'Here's my annual attempt to get you to direct something for us. I got the script when I came back. I thought, 'There's no way I can do it, but I'll read

the script anyway.'

"So I read it, and, of course, I liked it. But I decided I couldn't do it. Two shows in two places! So I went into Laura's office to take back the stuff. I left the office saying I would do it."

She talked Ralston into it? "I talked myself into it," she said. "I started telling her what I thought the show needed and what I felt I could do for it. By the time I walked out of the office, we both said I have to do it."

The strangeness of "Gloria Duplex" is clear enough from its subtitle: "an erotic worship service for theater." Its main character is an exotic dancer who uses her talent to help spread the word of the Lord.

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THE FACTS

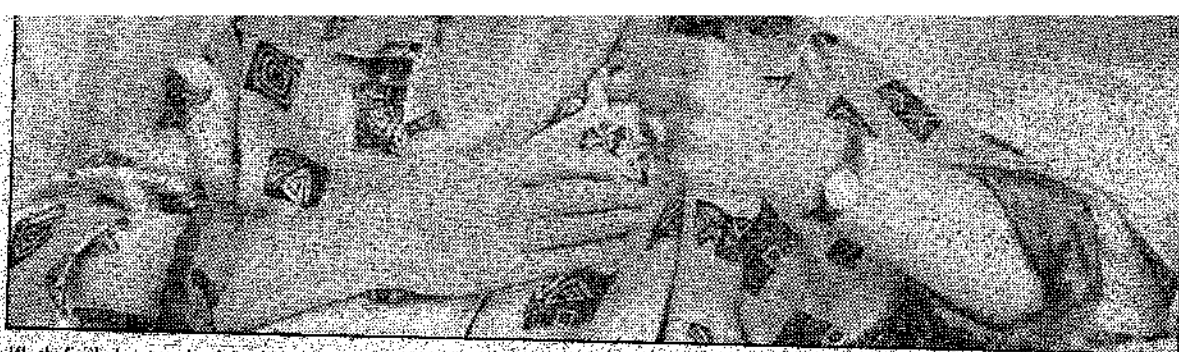
- **The play:** "Gloria Duplex"
- **Where:** Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys.
- **When:** Previews 8 tonight and Saturday. Opens Sunday, with performances at 2 and 7 p.m. Regular schedule: 8 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays, 3 and 7:30 p.m. Sundays, through Aug. 13.
- **Starring:** Brenda Thomson, Gregg Henry, Rhoda Geringan and Jeod Hubbard Boone.
- **Behind the scenes:** Written by Rebecca Wells. Directed by Teri Ralston.
- **Tickets:** \$15.50 to \$19.50 (\$11.50 to \$15.50 for previews). For more information, call (818) 780-2240.

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The show "is an evening at the
Kitten Paradise Temple and
Lounge," Ralston said. "It's an
evening of entertainment and
witnessing. It's spiritual in the
best sense, because it's positive
and glorious. It's irreverent, but
it's irreverent sincerely.

"Gloria has found her way of
reaching people, which is her
body. We're doing some pretty
raunchy stuff! She's up there
shaking it around and bumping
and grinding — but in a celebrat-
ing manner."

Will this offend people?

"I don't think so. It's a very
fine line to walk, but I think
we've walked it.

"It's very delicate, in a sense,
because whenever you deal with
anything that's religious in na-
ture, it can turn people off. But
that's not what it's really about.
It's about opposites.

"(Playwright) Rebecca Wells
(who also starred in the 1987

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Seattle) contrasts light and dark
and men and women and the ero-
tic and the sacred."

Ralston's relationship with
South Coast Repertory is as long-
term as her Back Alley connec-
tion is new.

"I was with them the first year,
and this is their 25th," she noted.
"A lot of (the founding members)
went to school together (at San
Francisco State University, now
California State University, San
Francisco). We're like family. I
did "Prelude to a Kiss" with them
last year. I go back as much as I
possibly can. I adore them.

Obviously, "Sunday" — the
1985 Pulitzer Prize-winning mu-
sical that tells how painter
George Seurat created his most
famous painting — strikes a per-
sonal chord in Ralston.

"It's about our passion (as
artists)," she said. "We have to
"finish the hat" (i.e., perfect the
work). (It also explores) how dif-
ficult that is for relationships, the
choices we all make for our work,
and all of that."

Choices like giving up a per-
sonal life for a month to do two
plays at once.