

NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE SPACE, SPRING '87

FEATURE

The Making of a World Premiere

Gloria Duplex, an "erotic worship service for the theatre" written by Rebecca Wells, will receive its world premiere at The Empty Space this April. This unique theatrical event is part gospel service, part storytelling, and part jam session, brought together in a New Orleans nightclub and revival hall, the Kitten Paradise Temple and Lounge. "The world of Gloria Duplex is fictional," explains playwright/actress Rebecca Wells, "a fully imagined world rooted in the strip joints and spirit churches found all over New Orleans."

A colorful cast of characters are in residence at The Kitten. Lu Gremillion's watchful eyes and warm heart welcome us into her establishment. There's Reverend Mother, guest pastor and Gloria's spiritual adviser, whose inspired words and soulful voice rise up to heaven in spirit and song. And then there's Bud, whose straight talk and cowboy brawn help keep Gloria willingly down to earth and whose spiritual art adorns The Kitten. And, of course, there's Gloria Duplex herself, a young woman with her roots buried in the white trash, liquor bottles, and greasy spoons of New Orleans, but who, through her pain and the grace of God, has a vision and a voice for the glory of the Lord.

Continued on inside pages.



Rebecca Wells

NSIDE

Look inside for these and other stories:

- News from the Rocky Horror Gang. What have they been up to and who's coming back?
- Where are they now? Updates on the whereabouts of some of your favorite actors from the Empty Space stage.
- Artistic Recharge! What does it mean? Are "Artistic Recharge" contributions going toward The Space's deficit? If The Space sells lots of tickets to *The Rocky Horror Show* this summer, won't that solve your problems? Find out the answers to these and other questions on the inside pages?

CALENDAR

GLORIA DUPLEX

A musical celebration of body and soul April 15–May 9

GLORIA'S GUMBO

A red hot Cajun party to benefit The Empty Space May 8

In The Lobby through May 9: "Spirit World," photographs of New Orleans by Michael P. Smith.

"JOURNEY"

A sound collage installation by Kathleen Helfrich and Suzie Kozawa June 4, part of First Thursdays Gallery Walk

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW

Revival of the hit sci-fi rock musical Previews June 6, 8, 9, 10 Runs June 11 – July 5

Box Office Hours:

Tuesday through Saturday 1:00-8:00 Sunday 1:00-7:00 Call 467-6000 for tickets and information. Continued from first page.

"I became interested in female evangelists about five years ago," Ms. Wells says. "I was intrigued by the way they use their energy in a very powerful way, in a culture where women are so often secondary. When I read about these women I began to wonder what it would feel like to be in their bodies, and what it would mean to feel sexy and preach the word of the Lord. As I learned more about female evangelism I also became interested in other aspects of mysticism and religion. With the emergence of the Radical Right, there appeared to be little tolerance for any sense of balance between good and bad, darkness and light, the spirit and the flesh. I found this very disturbing and wanted to show that these opposites are natural and necessary.

As Rebecca Wells' awareness of female evangelism and the issues concerning religion grew she began to write. "I was finishing the final draft of *Splittin' Hairs* before it opened at TAG. I was really tired from working all day but I sat down and wrote the first draft of 'Ministry,' a 45-minute monologue. The words came out

and I realized I had created someone who could speak to the integration of those inherent opposites that people like the Moral Majority — and much of orthodox Christianity for that matter — are working so hard to deny. That voice, Gloria, a most unlikely of visionaries, could find a vibrant balance between the body and the soul."

The process of bringing Gloria Duplex from that first draft to full production as a world premiere has been blessed in many ways. In 1985 Rebecca wells received an "Original Works" grant from the Seattle Arts Commission. "Ministry" became the centerpiece of Act I, while a second act, several new characters and a stage band were added to what was now called Gloria Duplex. This new work was presented in a workshop production at The Empty Space in September of 1985, supported by the Seattle Arts Commission grant. It was on the basis of this production that The Empty Space committed to produce the play in the 1986-87 season. In 1986, The King County Arts Commission awarded Ms. Wells and The Empty Space a Playwright's Project grant which made it possible to further develop the script and present a staged reading in January 1987.

"This has been a superbly helpful way to work on my play. Every playwright heading for a first production of a script should be able to do as much. It has permitted me to really find the balance between the spiritual and the secular, both within Gloria and within the whole production. I came away from the workshop in '85 feeling very high about the piece. I was pleased with the way it went and could have cleaned it up and left it just like that but it was too up there, you know, too sunlit. I needed to look at Gloria again and find my way through to her pain. I needed to explore the darkness of the piece, to walk in its shadows."

Ms. Wells continued to work with director M. Burke Walker on the rewrites and also had the fortune to find another voice for Gloria, Seattle actress Susan Ronn. "Being able to hear Susan read Gloria has been a real treat," Rebecca exclaims. "She's so good at her craft and has brought a whole new perspective to the piece. Working with Coby Scheldt and Ben Prager on Bud has been very enriching. Having Pat Wright (Director of the Total Experience Gospel Choir) do Reverend Mother is a godsend! She brings a wonderful spirit and knowledge to the work."

"Part of the reason Gloria preaches is to bear witness to her own struggle and her own pain," Rebecca added, "but it's also a true celebration. Gloria, Bud, Lu and Reverend Mother know that to get high you gotta get down, you know. You've got to remember where you were and how far you've come. That's something worth celebrating and The Kitten is the place to do it!"

BOD: Greet all The brethren with a hory kiss! Th. 5:26
Meria ad liber while Bud bisses Lu and Em) 10 RED. MOTHER: Fig me up! Lu: You're talking nam! BANB: (overlapping) Well, ges! (Glaria crasses ceater) (2) GLORIO: Allow me to introduce my people now. (Band hits a lick for each intro.) First of all, want (Bond file o "Lo" lice)

The appear and proprietor of this Paradise, Lu Grenillion. 3 (Spotlight on 10 of par.) Evening a very body now dwent yell to LU: (To audience.) | Tom a respectable place too and ion't yell ever forget it. Go on, look around you, you not oing to find any chemed-up gum stuck to your chairs or garet butts on my floors. Nuh-hub. I range mple-lounge a person can be proud of. You not gon ed to run home and take a shower cause of the smellsucked up in my place. That's -

Scripts go through many revisions before rehearsals begin and right up to opening night. After the premiere is over, the script is then rewritten into final form. A very integral and uplifting part of the Gloria Duplex celebration is live music. Musical director Jim Ragland has assembled a dynamite group of musicians including Bill Shepherd on Cajun accordian, Kevin Wimmer on fiddle, Michael Powers and Larry Taylor on bass, Gregg Keplinger on drums and Ragland himself on guitar and keyboards.

There are twelve numbers altogether in Gloria that vary in style from gospel to Cajun to rhythm and blues. "What's so different about the musical part of this show," Ragland explains, "is the different styles work and how well they work together. It's mainly gospel music but there's also Cajun and some blues. I don't know any other show that has used Cajun music. And the sound is really great. Pat (Wright, director of the Total Experience Gospel Choir who plays Reverend Mother) does most of the singing and all the solos. She has a great voice and has put together harmonies for the rest of the cast. The voices sound really good together."

This will be the third show at The Empty Space this season that has benefited from Ragland's musical talents. He did the amazing job of directing music and designing sound for The Rocky Horror Show, but the production he found most challenging was Don Juan, a job that won him praise by critics and audiences alike. "Writing music from the ground up can be very gruelling," Ragland confessed. "I had to compose probably twelve scores for Don Juan and used only three. There was no reference point in terms of period or musical style and with the budget we had I had to really scramble to come up with something that worked. But it came out great. People really liked it."

Anything more to say about *Gloria Duplex?* "Well," Ragland concludes, "a lot of it is in 'F'."

Enter the "Spirit World"

To highlight the uniquely Southern and spiritual aspect of *Gloria Duplex*, The Empty Space has installed an exhibit from the Louisiana State Museum of 27 framed photographs by Michael P. Smith. The exhibit, entitled "Spirit World" documents the soul of New Orleans, its people, their costumes, their churches, and the breathing, healing spirit that makes the city come alive.

Nicholas Spitzer of the Louisiana Folklife Program wrote, "Michael Smith goes in depth and takes his time. He has been photographing the black street culture, the possession trances of Spiritual Church members, the bejeweled call-response of Mardi Gras Indians, the car dealers, the hustlers and crusaders of black New Orleans for over fifteen years . . . the images become symbols for his subjects, for the black communities of New Orleans and the depth, diversity and beauty of their cultural traditions."

Michael Smith himself wrote, "My intellectual motivation for photographing in these communities has come to be an interest in how religious and social expressions of traditional underclass cultures have contributed to stability in our increasingly disturbed and complex urban environment. My personal motivation continues to be a simple fascination with the unique cultural diversity in the Mississippi Delta Region and the fertility of its traditional cultures in producing such a world-recognized wealth and variety of quality music, folk arts and crafts, cuisine, and related public celebrations and festivals.





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Jim Ragland (on guitar, left) is pictured here with The Paradise Playboys: Larry Turner on bass, Kevin Wimmer on Fiddle and Gregg Keplinger on drums. The instrument you see Bill Shepherd playing is called a Cajun Diatonic Button Accordion. Although it's small in size, it is one of the world's largest accordions, with four reeds operating for every button pressed accordion was probably brought to Louisiana through Mexico and Texas by European settlers.