

EMPTY
SPACE

NEWS

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

INSIDE

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.

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 ^{largest} ^{tonds} accordions, with four reeds operating for every button pressed (depending on the direction the bellows are operated). This type of accordion was probably brought to Louisiana through Mexico and Texas by European settlers.

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