

GERALD
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July 23, 1989

To: Theatre-goers of Los Angeles

c/o: Jean Hubbard Boone, Gene Butler, Rhoda Gemignani, Allan Miller, Teri Ralston, Brenda Thomson, Rebecca Wells, Larry Wilkins, Laura Zucker

Back Alley Theatre
15231 Burbank Blvd.
Van Nuys, CA 91411

Subject: GLORIA DUPLEX: An Erotic Worship Service for Theatre

All right, people, there is something very wrong when a theatrical event of such power, perception, warmth and humor as GLORIA DUPLEX is not jam-packed to the rafters at a Saturday night performance.

Was there something on TV last night? Yes, I know how the tube can be a kind of drug, but nothing could have matched the mesmerizing effects of such incredibly deft use of our language as you find in GLORIA DUPLEX. You can just stare into this production as at a whirling pool of water, possessed by its sinewy turns of phrase and transcendent use of imagery. Come to this play and you will see things you've never seen before.

You'll hear speeches that will prick your consciousness, too. What the hell is going on down on that huge cross rimmed with lightbulbs and plexiglass? Exotic dancers who see the power and the beauty of the divine spirit of the world? Could it be? In GLORIA DUPLEX, it could and is. Or at least these actors make you believe it while they make it happen in front of your face and in your mind. The spirit of love mixed into each and every little thing on this earth... as told by a sexy lady in garter belt and mesh stockings... as shown by a drunken cowboy piano-playing rodeo rider turned philosopher... as provided by a female bar owner who enjoys real life as much as real good stories... as demonstrated by a reverend who can whip up a crowd through her use of song.

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Am I getting through to you at all, theatre-goers? There is so much going on in GLORIA DUPLEX that you might want to go back and worship again. Is that the problem? Are you afraid that this is something that might convert you? Well, remember, I haven't even mentioned the love story that blossoms in Act Two, and the revealed truth about what the divine spirit really wants from us in the world. And remember, too, what Lu, the proprietor of the Kitten Paradise Temple and Lounge, has to say about life, love, theatre, and worship: "Them that have eyes, see; them that have ears, hear; and the rest of y'all just have a good time!"

A good time! That's what you'll have at this magnificent production of a truly great new play. Take the music, for example. Let's talk about Larry Wilkins, electric guitarist extra-deluxe. This guy's solos are worth the price of admission. Now, I've seen Lee Ritenour, I've seen Stanley Jordan, I've seen Kenny Burrell, I've played Charlie Christian records... hell, I've even seen George Benson back when he still played straight-ahead jazz. But this Mr. Wilkins rips off a couple of runs that would have club fans whoopin' it up something fierce. Do we theatre people have no taste for stone gas funky pluckin'? I say we do, so get over to the Back Alley and prove me right.

What a complex sort of script this is. Rebecca Wells has taken Jesus, sex, passion, love, despair and gumbo and wrapped them up into a beautiful onslaught of ideas and emotions. Humor? You bet. Sorrow? Yes. Thoughts on the nature of humankind? Yup -- woven throughout with a sure hand and a fine sense of the dramatic. The thought process that created this is so toweringly effective that you can see the sparks from her brainwaves fly off like the two kinds of light streaking from that mirrored ball at the top of the Kitten Paradise Temple and Lounge. This is theatre of right now, and you want to grab onto it as it becomes a part of history. Teri Ralston has directed a masterpiece.

Making it all come alive are some actors who could never receive enough applause from this theatre-goer. Jean Hubbard Boone takes the audience in her hands and with some sort of inner authority makes us hers whether she's preaching or belting out the finest, sweetest gospel this side of the Rev. James Cleveland's Choir.

Rhoda Gemignani has such command and superb timing that she makes straightforward dialogue sparkle and makes the tiniest bit of humor seem outrageously funny. What a generous performer, too, always feeding into the action, helping this emotional rollercoaster of a play stay on the tracks.

Gene Butler can look evil, magnanimous, shy, or powerful and assured -- sometimes all within the space of two minutes. He does something else, too. He acts from the inside, letting the audience see just enough of what he's feeling to send a clear signal, but leaving most of the emotional punch somewhere within his presence... the result is that anyone caught up in his character is rewarded by witnessing a splendid acting tour de force and yet he doesn't grab attention away from the thrust of the play. Amazing job.

Okay. The girl playing Gloria. Gloria Tom Duplex. First of all, Brenda Thomson is so fucking good that she didn't make me question that weird character name until I was re-reading the program after the show. I could go on and on about this performance -- the levels of sensation she projects, the zeal with which she attacks the part, and much more -- but by now, you probably get the point that her Gloria Duplex and GLORIA DUPLEX the play, are not to be missed. Anyone who sees it will always remember it. Anyone who sees Brenda Thomson's performance will always remember it. One more point: there is a speech just at the end of the play in which she becomes so focused, so intense, and so much an icon of theatrical excellence that you can become one with her. In an acting sense, she puts out, and it feels good, really good. Ms. Thomson, I did have a bit of trouble seeing clearly during the last thirty seconds of your speech because of something that hasn't happened to me in a theatre since about the fourth grade: I was crying. Thank you.

Thanks to you all. It was so fine!

Gerald Robert Lawrence

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