

Talented Cast, But Confusing Story Line

By DAVID PEEVERS

Corsair Contributor

"Gloria Duplex," at the Back Alley Theater, has a tremendously talented cast, a great deal of rip-snortin' cajun music, some astonishing writing and more than its share of confusion about what it's trying to become. It is, however, a good bit of raunchy, whacked-out fun.

The heroine, Gloria, is a low-rent erotic dance priestess who has discovered Jesus and self-worth in her temple—a New Orleans honky-tonk called the Kitten Paradise. Owned by Gloria's boozey mentor, Lu Gremillion, the Kitten Paradise is a hide-out and haven for souls on their way to revival. Easing the spiritual healing processes along are Bud Joseph (a lanky rodeo rider with a weakness for peaching and Gloria) and Mother Willie Mae Felix, an enormous black faith healer.

The play is a loose collection of stories about the nature of loneliness and finding love. At their best, these stories are as moving as Molly

Bloom's speech in *Ulysses*. At their worst, these soliloquies forget to advance character or story. But we live in a time when a playwright—such as Sam Shepard—can make such writing a 25-year career.

But "Gloria Duplex" is not Sam Shepard. It is a powerfully performed musical in a wildly colored set. It is a bunch of very able musicians playing some great cajun rock. And it is an investigation of longing spoken by some interesting and compelling characters, tender as a kitten and as fiery as a shot of cayenne pepper up the nose.

"Gloria Duplex" (which played to packed houses in Seattle, where it debuted) may not exactly be theater. But it is an unusual and healthy horse—of a decidedly different color.

"Gloria Duplex" shows Wednesday through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and at 3 and 7:30 p.m. on Sundays until August 13. Tickets are \$15.50 to \$19.50 until August 13. Call (818) 780-2240 for more information.



SUPPORT AND FRIENDSHIP—A troubled Gloria Duplex seeks spiritual assistance from healer Willie Mae Felix in a production by the same name at the Back Alley Theater.