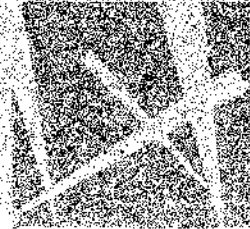


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premiered in 1987, found it to be an audience and critic pleaser. The question is: how will it play in L.A.? A few of the opening night audience didn't return for the second act - possibly because it was too risqué or sacrilegious, or both, for their tastes; however, the majority that stayed laughed, sang-along, and applauded throughout the remainder of the evening.

The heroine, Gloria Duplex (played lustily by Brenda Thompson), is the type of woman that country songs deal with. Thrown out of her home at the age of ten by her drinking, whoring mother, she thinks she sees Jesus on a TV screen. After several promiscuous teen years waitressing, she lands in the Kitten Paradise Lounge in New Orleans and is hired by its owner, Lu (Rhoda Gemignani), as an exotic dancer. There she again thinks she sees Jesus, this time in the turning crystal ball hanging above the dance floor. Soon the lounge adds the word "Temple" to its name as Gloria adds religious prayer and song to her strips, bumps and grinds.

Helping her in this sexy and spirit-filled journey toward inner peace is black preacher-healer-gospel singer, Rev. Mother Wille Mae Felix (Jean Hubbard Boone), and Bud Joseph (Gregg Henry), a former rodeo rider who makes sacred art out of trash while becoming Gloria's exotic dance partner, and her lover.

A lot of effort has been invested to make this complex production work. Director Teri Ralston, with a list of credits a mile long (as performer in the original *Jacques Brell*, and many a Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim

musical, to directing numerous regional and L.A. shows); has kept all the diverse elements moving at high speed. Her nicely chosen cast are well suited to their roles— each performance is superb.

Set designers Dorian Vernacchio and Deborah Raymond literally transformed the intimate Back Alley Theatre into the Kitten Paradise by ripping away the front seats and backstage wall and erecting a real bar, runway, tables, and a bandstand where the great four piece band provides all the music. Lawrence Oberman adds the finishing atmospheric touches with strings of colored lights, and a revolving crystal ball.

Very few small theatres would dare to tackle a production of this magnitude. Artistic director, Alan Miller, fresh from his *Voice of the Prairie*, seems to relish these challenges. The Back Alley is at 15231 Burbank Blvd., in Van Nuys just East of the 405 Freeway. For additional information see ON STAGE Smaller Theatres. ❏

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Gloria Duplex

By Archie Rothman

With a title like *Gloria Duplex: An Erotic Worship for Theatre*, you might expect something different— you won't be disappointed. This play, now having its California premiere at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys, is a unique mixture

of styles and content. Defying most conventional theatre forms, Rebecca Wells has written a theatrical melange that combines raunchy, rowdy comedy with dramatic tragedy and revival tent fervor, highlighted by live music ranging from Louisiana Cajun to black gospel to rhythm and blues.

Seattle, Washington, where the show