



REBECCA GILMAN '87

Chicago

AWARD-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT, GUGGENHEIM FELLOW, AND AUTHOR OF *THE GLORY OF LIVING*, *SPINNING INTO BUTTER*, *BOY GETS GIRL*, *BLUE SURGE*, *THE LAND OF LITTLE HORSES*, AND *MY SIN AND NOTHING MORE*, AMONG OTHERS

Rebecca Gilman has an impressive career which includes writing plays that were commissioned and originally produced by the Goodman Theater in Chicago, along with plays that premiered in New York at the Lincoln Center Theatre, as well as those that have played in regional theaters throughout the world.

Her play *Spinning into Butter* received a Joseph Jefferson Award for Best New Play, as well as the Roger L. Stevens Award from the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays. Gilman's *Boy Gets Girl* and *The Glory of Living* also received Jefferson Awards. *Spinning into Butter* was included in *Time* magazine's list of Best New Plays for 1999 and has been optioned for film. *Boy Gets Girl* was named No. 1 play of the year by *Time* in 2000. *The Glory of Living* garnered two prestigious awards for Gilman: the George Devine Award and the *Evening Standard* Award for Most Promising Playwright. Named one of *Time* magazine's top 10 plays of 2001, *The Glory of Living* also was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

Gilman says that she loves much about being a playwright, but what she enjoys most is the collaborative nature of the theatre.

"I'm lucky in that I get to spend my time with a lot of talented, inspiring artists," she says. "Between the work of the director, actors, and designers, the end result on stage is often better than anything I imagined on the page. It's very satisfying work."

When asked where she finds the inspiration for her plays, she says that she gets ideas from many places, but primarily from her own personal experience.

"I get ideas from the newspaper, fiction, poetry, even people I see on the street," Gilman explains. "My play *Blue Surge* was inspired by a Bruce Springsteen song. I try to be open to any-

thing and not to judge ideas one way or the other until I've had a chance to play with them. Some of what I thought were my best ideas have turned into train-wrecks of plays. Others I've had to sit with for a couple of years, but then something good comes out of it."

Gilman recently opened her adaptation of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta. Rehearsals will soon start for her adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* at Goodman Theatre in Chicago. After that, she says she'll start writing an adaptation of Emile Zola's *Germinal*.

"All these adaptations are commissions and it's just a coincidence that they've all come at the same time, but I'm really enjoying them," she says. "After *Germinal*, I'm going to write something from scratch."

Gilman credits her education at Birmingham-Southern for her initial interest in writing for theatre.

"My senior year at Birmingham-Southern I decided to write a play for an independent study credit and the college was so supportive of my idea," she recalls. "Michael Flowers and John Tatter (English professor) were my advisors, and they were both so helpful and encouraging. The play was *The Land of Little Horses*, and when it was finished Michael Flowers offered to let me use the theatre over the summer to mount a production. I don't think that would have happened at a larger university where the competition for resources can be fierce, and the faculty doesn't have the time to become as involved with their students.

"The production turned out well and I had a blast, and then I headed up to the University of Virginia to start work on a Ph.D. in English. I was planning on teaching, but I'd had such a great experience with my play at 'Southern that I started taking playwriting courses and spent more time in the Theatre Department than I should have. Then *The Land of Little Horses* won a playwriting contest that Ole Miss once sponsored and that pretty much decided it for me. I left Virginia and went to the University of Iowa to get my MFA in playwriting, and I'm happy that I did. And I don't think the world of academia is mourning my decision either."

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