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Laughing and Crying at a True Story
by **Bill Ervolino**

Less than a week before her show "La Miseria" was set to open at downtown's LaMaMa E.T.C., actress Penny Arcade decided to sit right down and right herself something else. The end result, with a cast of 10, plus 12 singers and dancers, opened six days later at LaMaMa. Arcade calls it "Based on a True Story."

Opening with the actress on a psychiatrist's couch, and concluding with a rousing musical number and conga line, "...True Story" is Arcade's way of coming to grips with, among other things, her childhood, her advancing adulthood, her quirky career and the odd stage name she chose for herself prior to joining Playhouse of the Ridiculous and Andy Warhol's Factory. (She appeared in Warhol's "Women in Revolt.")

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, it is a story about dealing with AIDS. Though not a "victim" per se, Arcade is, nevertheless, a witness. And the trauma she has endured, after losing so many of her nearest and dearest, spills into every corner of this work, framing the many laughs with unshakable emptiness, frustration and heartache. Make no mistake about it: This is one great, big mess of a play. It's awkward in spots, just plain awful in others. But there is no getting around the raw sincerity of it all - the yearning, the pain and the delicious comedy which fuels it and gives it life.

Arcade remains one this city's best-kept secrets. And though "Based on a True Story" is not the most ideal showcase for her talents, it is, nevertheless, a very special piece that is quietly compelling one moment and hilariously zany the next.