

Powerful Look At Women as Victims

PENNY ARCADE in "Bitch! Dyke! Fag! Whore! Part One (The Sex Show)." A one-woman catalog of sex for sale. 9:30 p.m. Thursday-Sunday through Sept. 2, P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., Manhattan. (212) 477-5288.

By Joseph C. Koenenn

PENNY ARCADE, who began life as Susana Ventura, is introducing audiences at P.S. 122 to some of the purveyors of contemporary commercial sex, beginning with the business-like manager of a high-class brothel and ending with a scantily clad woman reduced to tears over the unspeakable acts she's forced to perform.

They are spoken about, of course, in considerable scatological detail. And by the time Penny Arcade has moved from the manipulative to the manipulated, she has given us a powerful insight into woman as victim in the sex games we play.

Even before the show begins, sex is on display, in the form of three go-go dancers whose gyrations are repeated on video screens placed around the room. When Penny Arcade comes on stage, she's outfitted in a black suit, the uniform of a prim businesswoman whose business happens to be a brothel.

She alternately fields telephone inquiries from clients and corrects the indiscretions of her workers. She promises four student nurses — "Yes, with caps" — for Mr. Brooks, who wants the special baby treatment; cuts off a kid who asks for a student discount because it's his first time, and explores an offer of \$15,000 to torture someone — "For how long?" she wants to know.

She instructs one girl not to ask for tips anymore, tries to straighten out another who's "coked out of her mind . . . buzzing around like a vacuum cleaner" and orders yet another to stop having her boyfriend come over to pick up money.

A costume change brings Penny Arcade back in a skimpy black outfit and an almost New Orleans accent. "The only thing the sexual revolution did," this long-time hooker says, "was drive down the price of sex." She has an almost mystic respect for her "gift," her ability to be intimate with a stranger.

The title of the show is an incomplete list of the names she has been called. Her mother kept wanting "this nice Italian daughter," she says; she grew up instead "to be a major bitch."



Robert Rohr

Writer / performer Penny Arcade

"I grew up to be a bisexual and lesbians don't like us. They think there's something wrong with us, that we're not trying hard enough . . . Lesbians may not be mainstream but lesbian sex is. There are fifteen major men's magazines and they all have lesbian sex spreads. There's never been a better time to be a dyke than nineteen ninety. As far as being a woman, though, it's still not so good."

As poignant as she sometimes makes the exploitation of women, she offers no indictment of the people whose wallets are swelled from the labors of sex-

object employees.

Her chief target is hypocrisy, religious and political. Of those enemies, she says: "They're pulling the wool over America's eyes and it's seventy-five percent polyester."

Orthodox Jews are going to Washington, she says, to lobby for laws to force women to wear long sleeves because young men are being corrupted by the sight of uncovered flesh. "Haven't they heard," she asks, "of the constitutional right to bare arms?"

An alumna of John Vaccaro's Playhouse of the Ridiculous and one-time associate of Andy Warhol, Jackie Curtis and Charles Ludlam, Penny Arcade brings a more polished theatrical sense to her show than many downtown monologists. With set designer Tony Zanetta and lighting designer Lori E. Seid, she has made especially effective use of the limited P.S. 122 space.

Not everything works every time. When she stood in an aisle last week in unscheduled darkness, she announced: "There's a light on at this point." When it finally came on, she gave a cheery: "That's theater, darling." / ■

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