

SUMMER 1992
PAPER

★ BEST OF STAGE ★

Sexy Politics

Penny Arcade is not another NEA crisis art star.
By Caroline Palmer

If there ever was a "Woman on the Verge," Penny Arcade, a/k/a Susana Ventura, is she. But Arcade's not about to have a nervous breakdown — she's on the verge of something big. She's speaking out, she's angry and she's smart enough to make good performance that reflects her sardonic view of society. In keeping with a tradition of presenting her work during the dog days of August, when audiences clamor for the release offered by her charged onstage persona, Arcade will restage her sensational 1990 work *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!* (*The Penny Arcade Sex and Censorship Show*) at Performance Space 122 for a month-long run.

Arcade imbues *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!* with personal stories, political imbecilities and live go-go dancing. Describing the work

as a walk along society's fringe, Arcade says it kicks up "the dust in the unswept corners of sex, exploitation, censorship and self-censorship." "From the go-go platforms and peep shows of Times Square to the plush corporate whorehouse, to the childhood show-and-tell, to the avant-garde art hustle," the work is a relentless examination of "the politics of sex and the sex of politics." It is dedicated to writer Cookie Mueller and to women everywhere, with additional urgings to "Cure AIDS now!" and "End Censorship Now!"

When *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!* first opened nearly two years ago, the art world was reeling from the denial of grant recommendations to the "NEA Four" (Karen Finley, Tim Miller, Holly Hughes and John Fleck). Jesse Helms had

reared his ugly head, Mapplethorpe and Serrano were under attack, and a paragraph had been appended to the new grant applications, barring "obscenity" from publicly funded works. (This language has since been repealed.) Arcade, never one to back down from controversy, unveiled a show that dove headfirst into the maelstrom. Gyrating go-go dancers, alternately compassionate and bitter memories of an Italian-Catholic childhood and fiery commentary on the hypocrisy of the Church were all part of a show that changed nightly as Arcade uncovered more and more of the rage she wanted to share with her audience.

In 1992 there is even more to be angry about, and Arcade is remaking *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!* to reflect the times. Returning to the stage with Arcade are go-go dancers

Ariana Blue and Diana Moonmade, while new dancers include Kenny Davis, Leta Davis, Todd Fairchild, Scott Blond Boy and Pat Terrio. Taylor Mead, Bina Sharif and Ron Vawter will appear on video. Yes, there is nudity. Yes, there is explicit language. Yes, there are plenty of sleazy images. But Arcade makes no apologies. It's still art — uncensored, unexpurgated, unleashed. Arcade has worked and collaborated with the greats of American experimental theater, from John Vaccaro to Jack Smith to Charles Ludlum. And now she clears her own path in the performance realm, blasting out trails with all the subtlety of a stick of dynamite.

Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!
P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., July 23-August 23 at 9 p.m., \$10. 477-5288. ★