

Accent

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Broadway angels



Penny Arcade and her underdressed assistants challenge cultural stereotypes in "The Penny Arcade Sex and Censorship Show."

■ *The Penny Arcade Sex and Censorship Show* — The Village Gate, Bleecker and Thompson streets in Greenwich Village, (212) 475-5120.

We can't print the show's X-rated subtitle in a family newspaper, but pay it no mind. The title is a come-on disguising a smart, humane performance piece that daringly challenges our preconceptions about prostitution, lesbianism and both left- and right-wing PC.

Artist Penny Arcade, aka Susana Ventura, explains she's really a nice Italian-American girl, though she performs in the kind of plunging go-go dress you'd see in dingy Times Square bars. Her seriocomic monologues, like Lenny Bruce's best stuff, dissect complex cultural attitudes with surgeonlike strokes.

"Do you think they should have people handling missiles who can't handle the soap?" she asks about Pentagon homophobes.

Summing up lesbian attitudes toward female bisexuality, she observes, "If you're not a lesbian, you're not trying hard enough."

As you step into the underlit theater, young male and female erotic dancers shimmy in front of mirrors and TV monitors. You double-check your ticket, then realize that the atmosphere is surprisingly nonvoyeuristic. The dancers turn up periodically throughout the show, at one point getting the audience to come on stage and dance along with the disco tunes.

Some performance artists like to rub muck in your face. Penny Arcade takes a friendlier approach, at one point inviting the audience to sit with her in total darkness. She reminds us that normally brusque New Yorkers cooperate during blackouts.

"And you're not distracted by bad haircuts or unusual balding patterns."