

Everyone is a target for these one-liners

Theatre

Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!
Universal Theatre, Wednesday night

**DANIELLE TALBOT
and JOHN MANGAN**



WITH 'Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!', Penny Arcade successfully reclaims the pejoratives in a one-person, seven-dancer show that levels the sights at the actor's two favorite targets, the far right and the far left.

Barbs aimed at right-wing American senators and religious fundamentalists found a sympathetic audience at the Universal on opening night.

Her insistence, however, that some white-collar feminists have successfully alienated the people they purport to defend was more likely to make the audience squirm in its collective seat.

Arcade just doesn't like political correctness. Take censorship, for example, where, she pointed out, the radical left PC crowd has in the United States joined forces with the rad right in the battle against pornography.

Anything that smells of censorship is a threat, Arcade said — a line all the more powerful in the performer's US home where the Constitution has special amendments to protect citizens from that sort of thing.

Her modus operandi was low-key, sitting on a modest stage flanked by television screens, holding the audience's attention by sheer weight of her brassy Noo York manner.

Ostensibly a Comedy Festival event, 'Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!' fits more comfortably into the community theatre category, where it is probably one of the more sophisticated pieces to be staged in Melbourne this year.

But simplicity is the key to Arcade's message. At one stage she appeared on stage armed only with a US flag and a pair of black heels. On a philosophical front, Arcade's message was a mixture of '90s street savvy and '60s idealism.

A The product of the Warhol Factory in the '60s, Arcade espoused a philosophy towards humanity that was essentially all-inclusive. In this case that meant no one escapes her one-liners.

The comprehensive list included prostitutes, their clients, lesbians who only like straight women when they're battered, and gay men who've forgotten the significance of the struggle.

Arcade's most striking props were her dancers — a seven-strong team from New York and Melbourne whose job was to welcome audience members, encourage them out on to the stage at one point and generally provide the color and action between her monologues.

Scantly clad, the group's bumping and grinding hints at the shows crescendo — a powerful striptease that ultimately vindicates the rights of whores, gays and other minorities.

Sex, politics and religion have been the stuff of underground performance for the past three decades. In 'Bitch! Dyke!' Arcade drags this menage a trois kicking and screaming into the mainstream.