

Cabaret

A mind of her own



Penny Arcade: a powerhouse of educated opinions.

**Bitch, Dyke, Fag hag, Whore
Penny Arcade
Space Cabaret
Until Saturday night**

THE Year of Tolerance suits Penny Arcade very well. She is the New York performance artist and comedian who shocks the staid with the very title of her show.

She works with pelvic-thrusting, bare-buttocked disco dancers. She presents a monologue while nude on stage. She blacks out the theatre and performs in the dark. She talks of gays, lesbians, prostitutes and paedophiles. She was the surprise sensation of Christopher Hunt's Festival last year.

But the surprise was that she shocked only by disappointing the salacious expectations of the prudes. Her full-frontal exposure was of intolerance, repression and hypocrisy.

Penny Arcade is an evangelical emancipist.

She milks every sacred cow of the new-age politico-sexual revolution. But her satirical knife is buttered with love. Her quest is to debunk trendoid stereotypes.

She tears into the feminists, mocks lesbian follies, sneers at politically correct terminology. She laments the loss of color and character among the gay community and wishes many of them would get back into the closet.

She chides Catholicism for its double standards, jeers at politicians and points out that prostitutes are conservative businesswomen with

extremely dull clientele. She chides daringly against the new exclusivism – the insular attitudes of the minorities – and, without naming them, asserts a few compassionate “isms” of her own: emancipism, egalitarianism, liberationism, humanism.

Penny Arcade is a diminutive, raven-haired and husky-voiced New York powerhouse of educated opinions, all superbly scripted to roll like a series of elegant ocean waves from the highs of hilarity to the troughs of melancholy.

She has honed and developed the show she brought to Adelaide for the Festival – updating it with the very latest idiosyncracies of cultural politics. Like Barry Humphries, she has her astute social commentator's eye on the local ball and has done her homework on who's who and what is topical wherever she is. She perceives Australia's cultural cringe being usurped by the new nationalism. She warns against the country's slavish susceptibility to America's cultural imperialism. “Cable TV – don't get it! 500 channels and there's nothing on!” she screams, warning that cable TV spells an end to thinking.

And she ploughs right into the Australian State rivalries – which is quite acceptable, since she loves Adelaide with a vengeance. She calls it “the mind of Australia” – yet more evidence that she is a very perceptive person.

- Samela Harris