

■ Oh, Susana!

Although she was born into a Connecticut-based “immigrant, southern Italian, working-class, peasant family”, US performance artist **Susana Ventura**, aka **Penny Arcade**, has always been a New Yorker at heart—and an irrepressibly outspoken one, at that. “My outside and home experiences were very diverse,” recalls Ventura, whose tours-de-farce, *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!*, a vaudevillian statement on everything from prostitution to political correctness, and *True Stories*, a collection of multicharacter vignettes, are playing at Sydney’s Belvoir Street Theatre, with Adelaide and Melbourne seasons to follow. “[At home] it was medieval Italy—I was a serf.”

Not one to take serfdom lying down, Ventura ran away at age 13 and was promptly sent to reform school. “It was kind of horrible,” she says, “but great because I was out of the 14th century.” She wrote her first play there and, after leaving school at 16, acted in **Andy Warhol** films.

She has been a wild card in *way-off* Broadway theatre ever since.

Now a very adult 44, Ventura has taken her act to, among other places, Vienna, Munich, Edinburgh and Dublin. (“I’m the only person in the world who does Catholic stand-up comedy.”) Her international success, says the woman seldom lost for words, is “phenomenal—I’m a bit flabbergasted. I’m not a big believer in hope, but it’s very hopeful that people aren’t very different from one another. There’s just a common sense of absurdity in me and most people.”

Ventura will soon be matching her nose for nonsense with the wit of fellow showperson 86-year-old “stately homo” **Quentin Crisp**. “I’m going to Vienna to do my new show with him,” she proudly says. “It’s called *Quentin Crisp’s Last Will and Testament*. We’ll probably make a film of it.” Crisp, she adds, “is very vibrant and he *loves* Australia. I’m trying to talk him into coming back here. Wouldn’t it be incredible?” ■

▼ **OUT FRONT** Penny Arcade uses sexual energy—“the only energy”—on stage.



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