

The Advertiser

February 26, 1994

Powerful plea for love

Bitch! Dyke!

Faghag! Whore!

Proscenium Club

Review: PATRICK McDONALD

TEARING away the veils of censorship and repressed sexuality, the lurid facade of the Penny Arcade Sex & Censorship Show actually houses an impassioned plea for tolerance and strikes a desperate blow for love.

Part social messenger, part sexual evangelist, and a whole-hearted comedian, Penny Arcade — alias New York's Susana Ventura — possesses an intimacy and eloquence which is captivating and compelling.

The show has all the excitement, mysticism and energy of a pulsating nightclub.

Confronted on entering by glistening bodies of both sexes, writhing and grinding in dangerous proximity, the audience is instantly forced to assess its comfort with eroticism.

The dancers — especially those recruited locally — were clearly having so much fun that none of it seemed salacious, and intimidation soon gave way to shameless, joyous titillation.

Arcade then began to explore the title's role models through a series of wonderfully complete, insightful and hilarious characters, each of which evolved into an aspect of her own personality and experience.

Her honesty was startling.

The outward displays of flesh paled into insignificance alongside the way Arcade stripped herself emotionally bare.

Arcade is wickedly funny as a Texan escort who believes all the sexual revolution did was drive down the value of the service, and as a bored brothel phone operator.

"No, we don't kiss clients," she tells one inquirer. "I guess we think people should kiss people they're in love with."

In animated comic monologues, Arcade tackles the absurdity of the politically correct movement, the influence of fundamentalist groups on government, gays in the military, and even shares a few observations on Adelaide's own neuroses.

Initially conceived as an assault on the censorship of artists in the United States by Senator Jesse Helms, the show challenges self-censorship as our biggest hurdle.

Turning off the lights and amplification, Arcade reaches into the collective subconscious, plucking at raw nerves and forcing us to confront our own prejudices.

When she speaks of having lost 200 friends to a disease that no one wants to know about, she tears at your very heart.

It's a powerful message wrapped in a challenging package of inspired comedy and gaudy erotica, and it proved too much for some.

But it's a challenge more of us need to accept.