

THEATRE

Penny Arcade punches out something to remember

One-woman show revives characters from colorful past

MARTIN MORROW
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Meet the late Andrea Whips, forgotten Warhol movie superstar, the one who wasn't immortalized in a song by Lou Reed or book by George Plimpton.

Forgotten, that is, except by Penny Arcade, who was hanging out in Andy Warhol's freaky Factory, too, and now brings her back to life for the benefit of those of us who didn't, in her one-woman show *True Stories*.

Arcade, the seasoned New York performance artist who took One Yellow Rabbit's High Performance Rodeo by storm in 1993, returned to the alternative festival Tuesday with another amazing piece of gritty, honest, audience-friendly theatre.

Midway through her Tuesday performance, she assured us that, love her or hate her, you'll remember her for a year. Well, I still have vivid memories of her from three years ago.



PENNY ARCADE

That earlier show, *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!*, tangled head-on with the issues of censorship, homophobia, AIDS and prostitution. In *True Stories*, Arcade takes a more subdued approach, spending most of two hours impersonating six different real-life characters from her own, clearly colorful, past.

Along with Andrea, a Veronica Lake blond who doles out candies to all and sundry, she becomes, in order of appearance:

Charlene, an aging prostitute from New Orleans, fresh from plastic surgery, who regards herself as an "entrepreneur"; Aunt Lucy, a griping 77-year-old Italian mama from SoHo who introduces us to the virtues of Cool

Review

TRUE STORIES, written and performed by Penny Arcade, continues tonight and Friday at 10 p.m. in Big Secret Theatre, Centre for Performing Arts. Presented by One Yellow Rabbit as part of High Performance Rodeo. Tickets: \$10 tonight, \$12 Friday. Reservations: 264-8131.

RATING: ★ ★ ★ ★ out of five

Whip; Blondie, a seedy speed casualty now hypocritically shunned by yuppies who read William S. Burroughs; Girl, a panhandling, pregnant, black-Hispanic junkie with AIDS, who tries to cadge spare change by singing *We Are the World*; and Dame Margot Howard-Howard, a hilariously hoity-toity drag queen with an upper-crust British accent.

Some of these personalities are played primarily for their humor — especially Dame Margot, whose snooty account of scoring heroin in Harlem is deliciously absurd. Others, particularly the pathetic Girl, offer a chilling glimpse into lives gone horribly wrong. These are the people you would normally brush past in the street. Penny Arcade makes you look them straight in the face.

When she slipped out of her guises halfway through the second act for some amiable patter, the touring Arcade complained that the media in other cities had misrepresented *True Stories* as glamorizing drugs. Say that again? On the contrary, if her previous production was subtitled *The Penny Arcade Sex and Censorship Show*, this one could as easily be called *The Penny Arcade Anti-Drug Show*. Just her brief imitation of the ultra-glamorous Warhol diva Edie Sedgwick, falling-over stoned and trying to light an already-lit cigarette, is a more than eloquent answer to that accusation.

Not all these character episodes are equally strong, but Arcade acts each one with considerable skill and frequent flashes of brilliance. She's one of a kind and it's great to have her back.