

# THE LAST JEW IN AMERICA?

Susan Mogul explores being Jewish in a performance at the Richmond Shepard Theater every weekend for a month. She answers the big questions: Why is there practically no great Jewish art? Why do Jews like Chinese food so much? Which celebrities are

individuality with group identity."

The case in point here is the reformed Jew trying to be assimilated into American culture. "There is so much contradictory behavior," Susan says. "Reformed Jews may no longer follow kosher laws, for example, but they still



*Susan Mogul is just trying to fit in.*

Jewish even though nobody thinks they are? (Michael Langdon? *You're kidding.*) Was Christopher Columbus really Jewish? She illustrates her performance with props and music. Connie Francis sings great Jewish hits. Johnny Mathis sings the Kol Nidre. The performance is definitely a comedy, but a very touching one.

One man wept through the Kol Nidre and gave heartfelt thanks to Susan after the show. "I'm Jewish, too," he said. Another man — probably an orthodox Jew, and a very sober character with yarmulke and beard — became indignant and started haranguing Susan halfway through the show for poking fun at Judaism. "Here I was worried about the Nazis coming down to bother me — and who should give me trouble but another Jew! Maybe I should be worrying about the JDL."

It shook her up. "I've always performed before audiences of artists, never in a theater — and I've never gotten this sort of reaction." Is she making fun? "Of course not. What the performance is about is: I've always been fascinated with the business of trying to fit into the norm — never mind being Jewish — and the strange, hybrid behavior that occurs as people try to mix their

operate as a group, even though it's out of context. They may not go to synagogue, but they do all shop at Loehmann's.

The title of Susan's piece is "The Last Jew in America." It's as Susan's mother says, "*You may be*, the way all your brothers and sisters are intermarrying."

Most of Susan's video and performance work is about the strange things people do to fit in. In one of her favorite pieces — called "Design for Living," which she performed in New York City — she made an elaborate salad, while another woman color-coordinated and manipulated Susan and her surroundings so that everything matched the salad. Another of her best-remembered works — "Waiting at the Soda Fountain," about wanting to be discovered and first performed in 1979 — is currently on exhibit in the "At Home" show at the Long Beach Museum of Art.

That was her first live piece, but she's done performances on video since 1973, when she came here from New York to be in the feminist art program at the California Institute of Arts. This is Susan's theater debut, and she's giving Barbra Streisand — appearing in *Yentl* up the block — some competition.