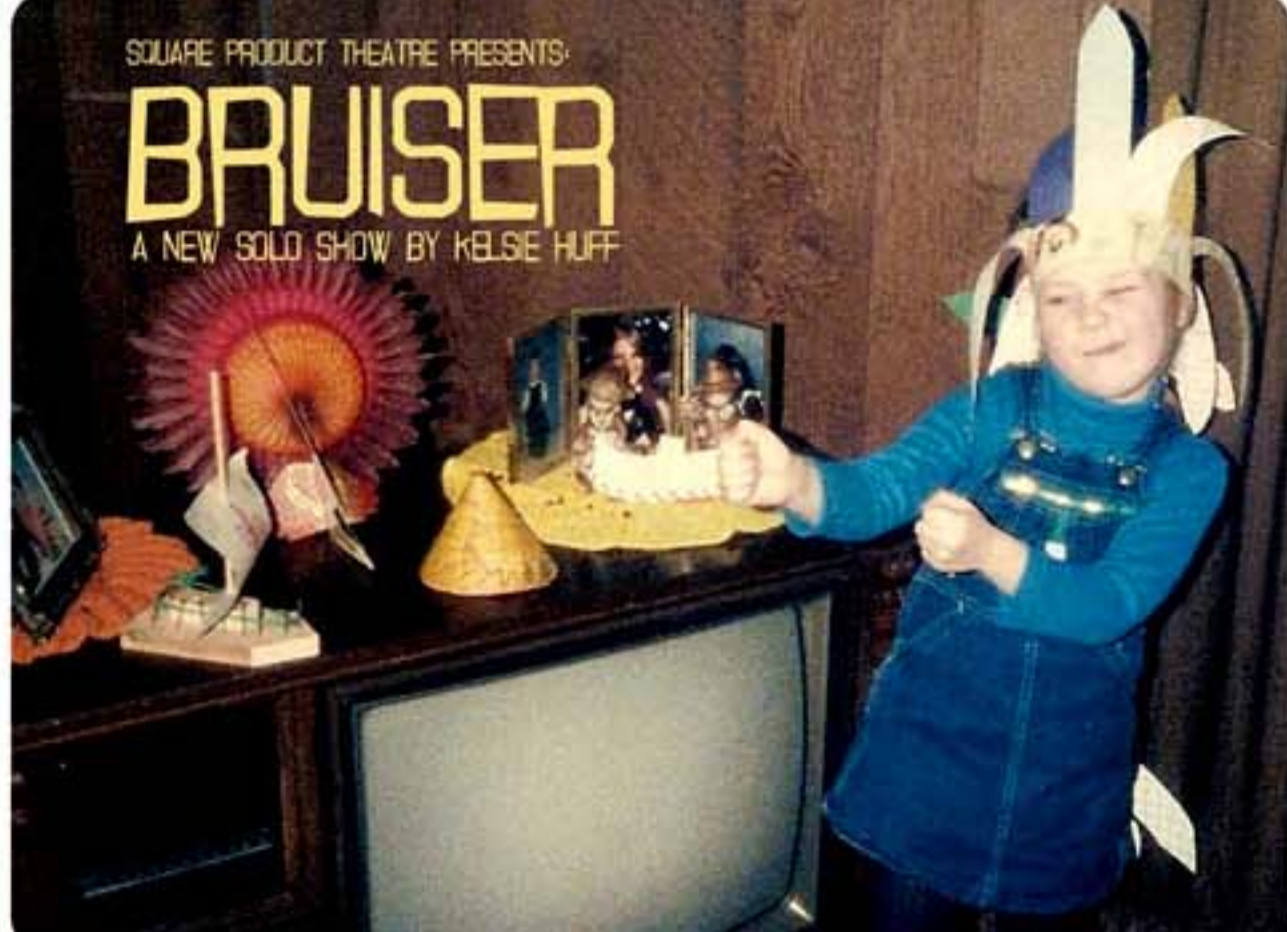


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Apr,
2011**Bruiser: Tales from a Traumatized Tomboy - REVIEW**Filed under: [REVIEWS OF SHOWS 'Now Playing'](#)Tags: [4 STARS](#), [Bruiser:Tales from a Traumatized Tomboy](#), [Don't Miss!](#), [Gorilla Tango Theatre](#), [Kelsie Huff](#)By *J. Scott Hill*

Kelsie Huff is a Chicago-based comedian who has made a departure from her usual stand-up and ventured into that ineffable realm called “solo performance.” Solo performance is often difficult to categorize. For example, Christopher Titus, John Leguizamo, Spalding Gray, and David Sedaris all have performed the same general type of autobiographical solo material; yet, while doing so, they are considered a stand-up comic, an actor, a performance artist, and an author giving a staged reading, respectively. I don't know what to call Kelsie Huff's solo performance piece, *Bruiser: Tales from a Traumatized Tomboy*, other than a one-person show – and a howling success.

Bruiser tells the end of writer/performer Kelsie Huff's childhood in three parts. First, Huff relives some of her time as a Girl Scout, those last days before boys began to matter. Then, she skates through an awkward puberty, during which her best friend was the most important person in her life. Finally, Huff is off to church camp where she first turned a mature gaze upon organized religion, ethics, and what counts toward being a good person.



Bruiser is a collection of some pivotal moments from Kelsie Huff's tweenage angst-y years, like time-lapse footage of her chrysalis. If *Bruiser* sounds like *Kelsie Huff: The Lifetime Original Movie* starring Tori Spelling as Kelsie Huff and that blonde girl from *iCarly* as Young Kelsie, it isn't. This is unflinching, thoughtful, and relentless self-reflection matched with master storytelling: poignant at times, yet always achingly funny. Huff creates a cast of fully realized characters who are loveable, quirky, and hateful – sometimes, all three simultaneously.

Oftentimes, when faced with a show that is purported to be based on actual events, an audience can get caught up in a struggle to weigh out what counts as fact and what counts as dramatic license. *Bruiser* creates a sense of perfect verisimilitude. Whether or not the new girl, or the boy at the roller rink, or the camp director's daughter are fabrications, composites, or impersonations, they are as familiar as the paneling in your parents' finished basement.

We laugh with Kelsie Huff. We laugh at Kelsie Huff. Whether Huff is highbrow or lowbrow, droll or goofy, I don't think there is a line she won't cross, or a taboo she won't break in service of an honest laugh. Yet, she is scatological without being puerile, witty without being smug. The frequent and furious laughs are organic to the stories, laughs earned by Huff at every turn. *Bruiser* never stoops to become a collection of superfluous gags and one-liners.

The only part of *Bruiser* that could be even wildly construed as superfluous is the inclusion of a short opening act. This performer changes from show to show; at the performance I saw, Amy Sumpter warmed up the crowd with her own unique comic style, like Mary Tyler Moore doing Jäger bombs with Judy Tenuta. Be warned: she kicks high.



Bruiser: Tales from a Traumatized Tomboy is an irresistible glimpse into the backstory of a comedian, a tantalizing look at the moments that warped a child's perspective enough to give her the ability to find humor in the face of dysfunction. As a writer and a performer, Kelsie Huff is endearing, engrossing, and brilliant.

Plus, she brings snacks.

DO NOT MISS the opportunity to go back to middle school for an evening with Kelsie Huff in her one-person triumph *Bruiser: Tales from a Traumatized Tomboy*.

4 STARS

(“*Bruiser: Tales from a Traumatized Tomboy*”, presented by Square Product Theatre, runs Thursdays at 8:00 p.m. through May 26 at Gorilla Tango Theatre, 1919 N. Milwaukee Ave, Chicago. 773-598-4549)

Gorilla Tango Theatre - Chicago

Kelsie Huff

Bruiser: Tales from a Traumatized Tomboy performance photos by Marcin Mroz.