

Dance Review: Sara Juli Will Tickle You at Motorco. No, Actually Tickle You.

Posted by [Brian Howe](#) [@Brian Gray Howe](#) on Fri, Jun 24, 2016



- Peek-a-boo: Sara Juli in *Tense Vagina: an actual diagnosis*

• photo by Arthur Fink

Tense Vagina: an actual diagnosis

★★★★★

Wednesday, June 22–Friday, June 24, 7 & 9 p.m., \$20

[Motorco Music Hall, Durham](#)

You can [read our interview this week](#) to catch up on the background of [Sara Juli's *Tense Vagina: an actual diagnosis*](#), which finishes its [three-night stand in ADF at Motorco tonight](#). Basically, it's a dance-theater-comedy show about postpartum urinary incontinence, pelvic floor rehabilitation, and the madder side of early motherhood. It's OK if you need a moment to take that in.

The first performance on Wednesday night left the whole audience tickled, and not always metaphorically. At several points in the show, Juli ventured into the seating to get in our personal space. She tied someone's shoes, made someone sit on her lap, brushed someone's hair, buried someone's face in her bodice. Later, she licked several people's faces. These moments were apparently improvised, as I heard they were different the next night, which included the kissing of a shining bald pate.

After making one audience member raise her arms and then tickling her, Juli came up to me and made me raise mine, too. I was wearing a tank top, so I felt exposed. I'm very ticklish, and I told her so. With her face inches from mine, she reached around my body and thumped me vigorously on the back "to get all the schmutz out." This was fitting of the character Juli plays onstage: a young mother slightly cracking up in her isolation with a baby, trapped in a state of manic care. At one point, she passed around a basket of snacks with careful instructions on how to eat them. I got Goldfish.

In many of the show's set pieces, Juli latches onto fragments of baby talk, song, and motherly motion and then agitates them into a state of panic or despair. At one point, she makes a tone poem of maternal concessions: "Water, no juice, no juice, OK juice, but no soda, no soda, no soda, OK soda," on through coffee and wine. She repeats the word "oatmeal" until it turns into sobbing. She sings snatches of "Farmer in the Dell" and "Skip to My Lou," travesties *The Little Mermaid* anthem "Part of Your World" ("Peeing your pants you don't get too far"), belts out Sia's "Chandelier" while wearing a breast pump, and serenades a garden of dildos outside a dollhouse with "(You Make Me Feel Like) a Natural Woman." She does it with the physical slapstick and vocal snap of a stand-up comic, sharpening the moments when pain tears through.

The developing narrative through it all is pelvic floor rehabilitation therapy, which Juli became evangelical about after struggling with urinary incontinence following the birth of her two children. It took her years to discover the therapy, in a culture more eager to sell women diapers than to educate them on healing, and Juli is ardent to spread the word. We learn a great deal about Kegels (and are led through a group practice of them). We learn about healthy urination habits and frequency, and what it's like to wear a biofeedback probe in one's anus. Most of all, we learn about ourselves, the blind spots in our knowledge of others and the boundaries of our comfort zones. *Tense Vagina* is the rare piece that harnesses art and advocacy into perfect harmony, making for an unforgettably hilarious and edifying experience.