

BWW Review: Rom Com-esque TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS Rings in the Holidays at Next Act Theatre Dec. 4, 2018 Kelsey Lawler, BroadwayWorld.com

Twelve (largely-failed) meet-cutes, four performers, two backup singers, and one very chatty partridge in a pear tree suffering from a year of aloneness. Those are the numbers behind Ginna Hoben's *The Twelve Dates of Christmas*, a play whose simple, rom-com-esque premise is greater than the sum of its parts.

In *Twelve Dates*, we spend one hour and forty minutes, no intermission, with Mary, a struggling New York actress in her thirties who has, in a nutshell, been dumped by her fiancé on Thanksgiving Day. Thus begins a year in the life and holidays of Mary and her many suitors: the perfect-but-too-soon guy she meets almost immediately at Aunt Kathy's Christmas Eggnog Party, the mid-20s bartender and one night stand on St. Patrick's Day, the over-planner, the ghoster, the asshole who skips out on date six without a word, the dude in the band who's moving to Prague next week. The usual suspects.

One might think the dreamboat from Aunt Kathy's party will wind up being Mr. Right by the same time next year, but *The Twelve Dates of Christmas* smartly leaves Mary's story loosely wrapped in the end, rather than tied neatly in a big red bow of predictable rom-com happily ever after. The fun of *Twelve Dates* is navigating each encounter and anticipating the next one. As Mary, Susie Duecker is funny, approachable, and smartly harnesses the many feelings associated with moving on.

Lending backup and festive vibes are the musical stylings of The Doherty Sisters and Jack Forbes Wilson. The Dohertys sing, coo, and serve up intermittent reactions to Mary's many tales, at one point wrapping her in gold tinsel garland in an attempt to get her into the Christmas spirit. They're fun, funny, and lend the right amount of support to Duecker's otherwise one-woman show. Forbes Wilson's piano accompaniment never skips a beat, bringing moments of musical sound-effect humor, too.

This is a script and a show that will no doubt most resonate with thirty-something singles, or recently-singles. I know because I'm smack dab in the middle of that target demographic. Mary's string of potential love interests certainly sounds familiar - the witty one, the one who's perfect on paper, the one with whom you could talk for hours, the one who can also quote *Macbeth*. Duecker ignites with the excitement one feels over these little signs of promise found in a potential partner, then turns and embodies the emotional roller coaster that is moving on after a breakup. Hers is a relatable versatility.

It's a different kind of Christmas show, to be sure. Simple in its premise and more of an introspective snapshot of one woman's life, rather than the sweeping "good will toward men" sentimentality that often accompanies such holiday fare. For some, the unconventional, chatty script will be a refreshing change; the chance for a fun evening spent with your best girlfriends, the newest of which is up on stage telling

you about her last twelve dates. For those with Buddy the Elf-caliber Christmas tendencies, however, this feels more like a story that's set at Christmas, rather than a Christmas story through and through.

That said, *Twelve Dates* does indeed serve up laughs and the rush of new love - a yummy buffet of the warm feelings one craves at the holidays. It also wisely makes you think about how the holidays affect those who are vulnerable, insecure, and grieving, wherever that grief stems from. Mary's breakup is one example of how a person might feel emotionally mixed-up and uncharacteristically alone at this time of year, and her story serves as a reminder to reach out to those people - and maybe stop asking about their love life at the family Christmas party.