

BWW Review: Tamiko Robinson Steele Sparkles and Shines in TWTP's TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS, Dec. 2, 2018 Jeffrey Ellis [Broadwayworld.com](http://Broadwayworld.com)

Tamiko Robinson Steele's bravura performance as Mary, the heroine of Ginna Hoben's delightful *The Twelve Dates Of Christmas*, is reason enough to spend an hour and a half in a darkened theater amid all the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. Now onstage in the fourth annual Tennessee Women's Theater Project production of Hoben's sharply written and wonderfully entertaining one-woman show, Steele brings her own sense of whimsy and fun to the role that Rebekah Durham so memorably portrayed from 2015-2017 for TWTP.

The role of Mary fits Steele like an elegantly crafted pair of handmade gloves, showcasing her tremendous talents to perfection and giving her the opportunity to put her versatility on display in Hoben's tale - first performed by the playwright/actress herself in 2010.

In *The Twelve Dates of Christmas* - which both celebrates and pokes fun at our endless fascination with holiday revelry and all the accompanying merriment - we first meet Mary as she's enjoying a quiet Thanksgiving morning in front of her parents' TV in Ohio. We learn quickly that her sister Sally, who's keen to stay in shape and ensure every other member of the family does as well, has spirited everyone off on a brisk walk around the neighborhood in anticipation of an afternoon spent at the groaning board of a Thanksgiving dinner.

But when Mary turns on the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade broadcast, she learns the shocking truth about her fiance's refusal to accompany her home for the family Turkey Day celebration: She spots him making out with Melissa, the skank from his office, on national TV. Shocked and appalled by what's she seen, Mary is further taken aback when her family arrives back to the house to announce that Sally and her boyfriend have become engaged.

What happens after that, when Mary returns home to New York (she's an actress, naturally, not unlike Steele herself who earlier this year played another fictional actress in Nashville Rep's production of Lydia R. Diamond's *Smart People*) is a series of ill-fated dates in which she meets and discards potential suitors to mark the subsequent holidays of the following year. In the process, we meet the men as Mary shares her stories about her Manhattan dating adventures that could make someone else, someone less self-assured and confident than our heroine, swear off men entirely.

The role is tailor made for the versatile, talented Steele who ably moves from character to another with an easy grace, using her lithe body like an instrument to morph from one character to another, altering her voice ever so slightly to create another person right before our eyes. Steele's estimable stage presence, thorough command of the space and her ability to deliver her lines as if she is speaking directly to each individual in the audience guarantees that Mary's charming tales hit home with genuine impact.

More importantly, neither Hoben (the playwright) nor Steele (the actress) ever allow Mary to play the victim in any of her would-be romances. Instead, Mary is very much her own woman, secure in her ability to make her own happiness whether she's in a relationship or not. *The Twelve Dates of Christmas* isn't some treacly, over-sentimentalized and formulaic Hallmark Channel holiday movie. Rather, it's a heartfelt and authentic look at one woman's foibles, both professionally and romantically, set against the backdrop of a series of festive celebrations.

Having seen both Tamiko Robinson Steele and Rebekah Durham play Mary, the strength of Hoben's script becomes all the more apparent. Each woman is the perfect Mary, yet their shows seem so different thanks to their different approaches to the character and their sublime delivery of the script. Even if you've seen *The Twelve Dates of Christmas* multiple times, you'll certain to find something new and exciting about the 2018 edition. And you're sure to leave the theatre captivated by Mary and the woman who plays her.