

All the Single Ladies...Act II Takes Unique Look at Holiday Time

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Rather than go with a typical heartwarming story for their holiday season fare, Act II Playhouse in Ambler has chosen an offbeat one-woman piece called THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS. Directed by the company's Artistic Director Tony Braithwaite, this quirky comedy runs on the theatre's intimate stage from December 10th to the 29th.

Playwright Ginna Hoben drew on her own experiences—and those of her friends—to create this 90 minute exploration of one year in the life of single actress Mary. Mary loves the holidays, and it's a big deal in her family as well; she is happily looking forward to spending Thanksgiving back home in Ohio, and having her fiancé there with her to share the fun. At the last minute he tells her he can't come because he's sick; but, while watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in her parent's living room she sees him kissing another woman on national TV. Thus begins her year of recovering from his betrayal and getting back into the dating scene. Make no mistake, TWELVE DATES is not a stage version of the "chick flick"; audiences of all ages and genders will enjoy getting to know this character; especially because Maggie Lakis, a veteran of Broadway's AVENUE Q, is adorable in the role of Mary. It is no easy task to engage an audience single-handedly for an hour and a half, but Lakis does a beautiful job. She makes full use of the playing area and deftly brings to life various relatives that are part of her journey—my favorite was "Aunt Kathy" (we all have one just like her). We also get a pretty good picture of the men she dates as she heals from her hurt and disappointment at losing someone she thought was going to be her life-partner. Let's just say "the course of true love does not run smooth". In Mary's case, it's generally a train wreck; she definitely kisses her share of frogs.

Braithwaite's considerable experience in this genre—and his years doing stand-up—are evident throughout. He's paced the piece well, giving Lakis moments to regroup, and allowing the audience time to digest the latest disaster in Mary's professional and personal life. It is clear he gave his actress some great guidance in how to tell a story. And set up the jokes...

All of this plays out on Dirk Durosette's simple, yet attractive, set depicting a cozy middle class living room, which Lakis nicely transforms in our imaginations to the assorted locales required. A perfectly executed lighting design by Andy Shaw and a charmingly adroit soundscape by John Stovicek support the piece beautifully. And the ladies of Avista Custom Theatrical Services have once again created just the right props. No coal in any of the tech crew's stockings this year.

THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS is a nice escape from the hustle and bustle of this time a year—and it's also a great reminder that not everyone's holidays are like something out of Currier & Ives. As someone who is single, it can be tough sometimes to see everyone else paired off at celebrations. Here's hoping we all find a special someone to share life with in 2014... Happy Holidays to all.