

Joy and Laughter in Next Act's 'Twelve Dates of Christmas'
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Anyone who has unwantedly endured a holiday season without a romantic partner will relate to Next Act Theatre's *The Twelve Dates of Christmas*. The show is an overflowing cornucopia of joy, laughter and heartbreak as seen through the eyes of a single woman.

GINNA HOBEN'S story stars Susie Duecker as Mary. In her quest for romance, Duecker is aided by a pair of singing sisters, Kelly Doherty and Marcee Doherty-Elst, and the myriad musical talents of pianist Jack Forbes Wilson. Together, they take Mary through an entire year of failed relationships. The action rotates between songs and a series of skits.

Mary begins her story in a self-satisfied glow. The New York City-based actress has become engaged to a really great guy. She envisions an endless series of holidays spent with her new love. However, she is also somewhat annoyed that her fiancé has begged off joining her at her parent's Ohio home. He claims to be stricken by food poisoning. Her glow turns to rage when she spots something familiar while viewing Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on her parents' television. When Mary sees a shot of (guess who?) kissing another woman along the parade route, she realizes that her dreams have evaporated.

So, the manhunt resumes. In her quest to find Mr. Right, Mary hilariously tries to evade the likes of stalkers, creeps and weirdoes that come her way. But, yes, she meets a few nice guys, too. In order to tell Mary's story, Duecker must create all sorts of other characters: relatives, single men and their jilted girlfriends and a little boy. She is ably guided in this effort by director David Cecsarini, who is also the theater company's producing artistic director.

Some of Mary's interactions are funnier than others. The laughs reach a crescendo when the recently unhitched Mary is forced to go solo to her aunt Kathy's holiday eggnog party. Duecker dons a pair of cat-eye glasses to impersonate the slightly tipsy, gossipy Kathy. When the latter introduces Mary to a dreamboat of a single guy who is also at the party, Mary is impressed. Unfortunately, the relationship ends up going nowhere.

It is only when Mary forgets about longing for a man that she realizes the progress she has made. She turns her attention to a cute little boy who is co-starring with Mary in a production of *A Christmas Carol*. Finally, she realizes the events of the past year have taken her to a better, healthier place in which to pursue human relationships. Next Act has served up a delicious treat that is a fine alternative to traditional holiday fare.