

ASHEVILLE CITIZEN-TIMES

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## **NC Stage Offers Solo Treat with '12 Dates of Christmas'**

By Tony Kiss

**ASHEVILLE** -Holiday theatre usually means an appearance by Scrooge, Santa, or maybe a department store elf, but N.C. Stage has something very funny and different with the one-woman romantic comedy, "The 12 Dates of Christmas."

Actress Julia VanderVeen gives a brilliant turn in this tale of a 30-something woman's search for romance over 12 months, starting and ending with the holidays.

There is probably nothing more difficult for a performer than a solo show, but VanderVeen makes it seem simple. She spins through this story with seeming ease, creating a host of characters and never dropping a line.

It's an amazing bit of acting by VanderVeen, last seen at N.C. Stage in the comedy "Boeing, Boeing." This is a comedy, but there's a good bit of truth in the story by Ginna Hoben, directed by Anne Thibault.

The tale revolves around New York actress Mary, whose fiancé is seen on national TV making out with another woman at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

Not only is the romance dashed, but Mary also must struggle through a family holiday get-together in Ohio before deciding what's next.

Then come the "12 Dates," none of them working out exactly as planned. They include a Mr. Right (too early after the breakup), an old friend (awkward), a Romeo physician (a love rat) and a one-night stand with an Irish bartender (fun, but no potential there.)

An aunt tries to find her next boyfriend, and her mom blabs every detail of her floundering love life, straining their relationship.

VanderVeen creates it all in a 90-minute whirlwind, performed without an intermission or props, other than Christmas ornaments placed on a tree to represent each encounter. The performance is perfection and ends all too soon without a contrived conclusion.