

Lexington Herald-Leader on Kentucky.com      By Candace Chaney

Project SEE Theatre's production of *The 12 Dates of Christmas* is about the travails of singledom during the "most wonderful time of the year."

When thirtysomething Mary sees her fiancé kissing another woman on television at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, she tosses her engagement ring into a Salvation Army donation bucket and embarks on a year's worth of dates. So goes the plot of *The 12 Dates of Christmas*, written by Transylvania University adjunct playwriting professor Ginna Hoben.

**The play is a fun, flirty romp through the highs and lows — OK, mostly lows — of one New York actress's quest for happy couplehood.**

The spirited comedic performance by Ellie Clark as Mary was a thoroughly enjoyable highlight of the play, which is reminiscent of other hijinks-laden singles comedies, including *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Mary, though, is far more ordinary than Bridget or *Sex in the City's* Carrie Bradshaw. She is from Ohio, is an actress living in New York, and she used to love Christmas. That's really about all we know about her, and Clark's chief challenge is to make ordinary Mary extraordinarily interesting. Clark mines Hoben's script for all it's worth and creates the most comically rewarding moments out of Mary's most vulnerable.

Clark . . . delivered a commanding performance. I especially enjoyed her portrayal of other characters in Mary's life, including a 5-year-old boy whom she befriends during an acting gig.

The play's ending, too, might irk some. On one hand, it suggests a resolution without tying things up in a nice bow; on the other hand, surely I was not alone in wanting to know, to visibly see and experience, whether Mary got her man.

Sullivan Canady White's direction brings out the best in Clark; the show's momentum never sags, and Clark is not bashful about directly connecting with the audience.

Sylvia Howard, Missy Johnston and Kim Berryman provided choral accompaniment and the occasional laugh or two as the "Doo-Wop Girls," who functioned as a live soundtrack to Mary's year of dates. The three have terrific voices, and their performances provided additional humor to the show.

All in all, this production of *The 12 Dates of Christmas* is not unlike a good first date. There's definitely a connection, a spark to be enjoyed, even if the whole evening is not perfect. I would be glad to do it again sometime.

**Candace Chaney is a Lexington writer.**