

Theater review: 'The Twelve Dates of Christmas' by N.C. Stage Company
December 17, 2018 Patricia Furnish, [Mountain Xpress](#)

Thanksgiving is the kickoff to the holiday season, and it seems as if Mary has everything she wants. That is, until she visits her family in Ohio and her fiancé who remained in New York (claiming food poisoning) is caught live on TV kissing another woman at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. He's even wearing the green scarf Mary knitted for him. This humiliation, broadcast nationwide, launches Mary into a series of comical, yearlong dating experiences.

This is the setup for *The Twelve Dates of Christmas*, a one-woman show written by Ginna Hoben and onstage at N.C. Stage Company through Sunday, Dec. 30. The show depends upon an actor with a range of talents. During the 90-minute play, Maria Buchanan (who returns to the role from last year's successful run) must perform impressions of her family members, dates and children, while also offering the physical comedy necessary to invigorate the stories she's telling. Buchanan charmingly draws the audience into her world as if we are her confidantes. She needs a sympathetic sounding board for her dating life antics. We are on her side.

The set design is sparse, with some holiday lights encased in boxes, which are functional. They break up the stage and allow Buchanan to make the most of her comedic postures. The most important element is the Christmas tree upon which Mary hangs an ornament to mark the end of every date she has. The ornaments represent some element of the relationship, like a guitar or a pair of handcuffs. It's a clever spin on tree decoration that suggests she can see the humor in each one of these choices. Centered high on the wall behind her is a clock that ticks every time a man leaves her life.

In this play, Mary is an actor who pays the bills as a waitress, a job she manages to secure through one of her bad dates. It's the production of *A Christmas Carol* that offers her a chance to see things differently. In many ways, even though she is cast as Christmas Past, she's more like Scrooge. Scrooge lost touch with family and friends and, over time, saw the worst in people. He became more isolated and scornful. Mary never goes that far, however. Buchanan sustains the energy of the performance, even at an all-too-brief moment of doubt and reflection in a local church.

The play contains some adult language that is meant to make Mary more of an earthy dame than a delicate, refined 30-something. She's the saucy heroine the audience roots for. Love can surprise even the most jaded of people on the dating scene, at least that's the upbeat message of the play. Mary relentlessly works her way through Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, wedding season, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Every time she has a date, she turns it into humor. Her way of dealing with love's disappointments makes hope and a happy ending possible.