

Review - The Twelve Dates of Christmas

Dec. 18, 2018 Alexa Chipman, [The Sonoma County Gazette](#)

Mary has the perfect holiday season planned out with her fiancée, when to her horror, instead of being at home with food poisoning as claimed, she sees him making out with a co-worker on live TV during Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Her dreams shattered, Mary sets off on a whirlwind of dating disasters that turns her sparkling Christmas spirit into a fury that makes Scrooge's attitude seem festive. In a holiday miracle, she recaptures her optimism and determination.

Jess Headington's engaging solo performance hides her character's pain under layers of vivacious energy. She makes meaningful eye contact with individual members of the audience, projects well, and her exaggerated impersonations are consistently entertaining. The kickboxing therapy routine is hilariously awkward, and Headington bounds up and down the set with relentless enthusiasm, debating whether or not to kiss an old friend on New Year's Eve, confronting her ex-fiancée, and arguing with busybody relatives.

Director Juliet Noonan uses physical comedy to keep the story enticing, bringing out Mary's exuberant, dramatic personality. She keeps a balanced rhythm of contemplative and sizzling timing until the abrupt, but adorable denouement. From an accurate description of being single at a wedding reception to disagreements with a matchmaker who insists on Mary wearing mistletoe in her hair until she catches a man, playwright Ginna Hoben infuses realistic, sassy humor. There are opportunities to ask her questions on December 28-30 at post-show talkbacks.

The production is let down by Conor Woods's sloppy scenic design, which consists of gold paint tossed into the semblance of a pattern, and a sad looking faux Christmas tree. Craig A. Miller's sound design of text message alerts and amusing music choices along with April George's marvelous lighting design augment the performance with subtle artistry.

"The Twelve Dates of Christmas" is cheeky holiday fun that adults can enjoy during a season filled with sentimental family shows. Headington is superb as Mary, and her tirades about difficult family interactions during the holidays are easy to sympathize with.