

In 'The Twelve Dates of Christmas,' a Woman Looks for Love, and Finds Many Other Things November 19, 2018 Jim Higgins, [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#)

With its rueful comedy and open ending, "The Twelve Dates of Christmas" isn't a Hallmark Channel kind of show. But Next Act Theatre's new production could appeal to singles and former singles who know that holidays can amplify the changes that dating puts a person through.

Created and first performed by theater artist Ginna Hoben, it's told by a character named Mary who, while watching the Macy's Thanksgiving parade on TV, sees her fiancé kissing another woman. Their breakup plunges Mary into a year of dating mishaps and heartbreaks, with side helpings of family commentary and intrusion.

As performed by Susie Duecker at Next Act, "Twelve Dates" sometimes comes across as observational stand-up comedy. Duecker plays all the characters; her back and forth between Mary and her mother reminds me of Maria Bamford's similar routines.

Director David Ceasarini has enhanced the production by fully incorporating the Doo Wop Girls, Kelly Doherty and Marcee Doherty-Elst, into the action. They're a kind of humorous musical Greek chorus plus helpful hands for Duecker. Keyboardist Jack Forbes Wilson performs onstage as well.

Thanks to all of them, after seeing this show you will never think the same way about a certain Alanis Morissette song.

Duecker portrays Mary as a likable contemporary Everywoman. While Mary is an actor good enough to be cast as Lady Macbeth, she never comes across as haughty or self-important. She criticizes her own lack of judgment for some wrong turns, making the times when she was let down by others so much more painful. While Mary's dating curve may be unplottable, she grows in self-awareness.

The show gains power in the final segment, when the playwright gives Duecker enough time and material to build an extended story out of Mary's connection with a Tiny Tim in a production of "A Christmas Carol." Her annus horribilis comes to a low-key but fitting ending, like a plane that touches down gracefully after a turbulent flight.