

Atlanta Theatre Buzz

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2014

11/29/2014 THE 12 DATES OF CHRISTMAS

Aurora Theatre

****½ (A)

ALL IN THE TIMING -- Brad Rudy ([BK Rudy@aol.com](mailto:BR Rudy@aol.com) @bk_rudy
#WorstStalkerEver)

I freely confess that I approached Ginna Hoben's "The 12 Dates of Christmas" with a bit of wariness. In description, it sounds very similar to Theresa Rebeck's "Bad Dates," an entertaining little monologue on the pitfalls of dating. On the other hand, I am a huge fan of actress Jaclyn Hofman, and would find pleasure in watching her read a scientific or economic policy briefing (not to subvert the dominant cliché, but anyone can make the phone book interesting).

Fortunately, this is a totally delightful script that is different enough from Ms. Rebeck's that I felt no sense of been-there-seen-that déjà vu. And, as expected, the energetic and marvelous Ms. Hofman makes me glad I took this particular journey.

Mary has it all. An actress in New York City, she is about to take her fiancé home to Ohio to meet her family at the annual Thanksgiving Gorge-a-thon. When he declines due to a stomach virus, it's a bit of a blip that turns full-scale crash-and-burn when Mary (and family) spot him kissing another woman on the Macy's Parade telecast.

What follows is a series of dates that are as varied as they are grist-for-the-tale. What they all have in common is that it's just too soon. Sometimes it's just NOT a good idea to jump into the shark-pool of single men when you're still bleeding from that open wound left by the last one. I could methodically list the various men who come into Mary's life (the ideal doctor, the stalker, the one-night-stand, the old friend, the new boss, the ex-fiancé, etc etc etc), but the point is that Mary just needs time to herself, to heal. Until that "perfect" date happens in one of the sweetest moments you'd never expect.

One of the aspects of this monologue I like is that none of these are really "bad" dates (even the stalker starts out sweetly). Some are even wonderful memories (the one-night stand with the perfect butt, to cite one example). What's clear is that Mary, throughout, has a strong idea of what she wants and when she wants it. Throughout the year, her relationship with her Mother and Family follows a similar pattern of I-Need-You-Now and Leave-Me-Along-Please. And it all climaxes in a nicely understated Christmas dinner with *{Deleted by the Spoiler Police}*, a time

during which Mary is playing “Christmas Past” in a production of “Christmas Carol.”

But, more to the point, Ms. Hofman creates a memorable character, one who wryly criticizes her own impulses and choices even more than she criticizes the men who pass through her life. She commands the stage from beginning to end, and I would have been happy to sit and hear even more of her stories.

A loose connection to the season is kept throughout the year as she decorates an on-set tree with keepsakes from the various dates, keepsakes both warm and funny and even a bit bawdy. She occasionally draws on male audience members to play a date or two, but none of it is mean-spirited. In fact, this is a thoroughly pleasant production, filled with nice moments and is, at base, a story about waiting for that right moment.

This is a story by nice woman not afraid to be a little bit naughty, one who is left a stocking-full of story as her best Christmas Present Ever.