

# Review of The 12 Dates of Christmas

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By **Kim Ruehl** on **12/06/2011 06:04 PM**

We live in a world of two Christmases. One is a jingly, happy, merry, glass-clinking, snow-cavorting good time. The other is marred by a harsher reality — be it a history of breakups or other hard knocks. Where holiday theater often plays to the former, gushing with gooey romance or playing off the legends of various Christmas myths, *The 12 Dates of Christmas* keeps it real. More memoir than Christmas story, the script (by Ginna Hoben) follows the life of an unlucky-in-love New York-based actress named Mary (Julia VanderVeen) from one holiday season to the next.

The play opens on Mary, entering a dark room alone, seething over the blaring of Christmas carols in every grocery and department store. She used to love the holidays, she recalls; then she saw her fiancé making out with another woman on national television ... in the crowd at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Needless to say, it was over, and now Mary gets to spend the ensuing year trying to get over it.

The play proceeds, through family-instigated blind dates, the torturous wedding of Mary's little sister (to which Mary has no date), and a year of 12 potential mates, ranging in likeability from perfect-but-too-soon all the way to stalker and beyond.

Over the course of the show's 120 minutes (no intermission, and it doesn't need one), VanderVeen relies on her adept, versatile chops alone to tell Mary's year-in-the-life story. There are, after all, no other actors and basically no props, aside from a stool on which she occasionally sits, and a tree on which she places an ornament for each failed suitor. Luckily, VanderVeen is well-cast — she brings a certain charming complexity to the character, who waffles back and forth from vulnerable to unaffected and downright determined.

Hoben's script is simple: its greatest asset. The show doesn't fall prey to the typical clichés of heartbreak sagas or holiday theater, and touches on the reality of disappointment without crossing over into doom and gloom. Indeed, throughout the play, Mary maintains a good deal of optimism and a sense of humor about her bout with Murphy's Law of Romance.

In short, *The 12 Dates of Christmas* is a nice, funny holiday play which is sure to heighten your holiday spirit.

Directed by Anne Thibault. Playing now through Dec. 18 at [N.C. Stage](#). Tickets \$20.