

'12 Dates' is a passion project for artist
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"The 12 Dates of Christmas" has been good to Annie Kalahurka. This is the third year in a row that she'll be starring in the one-person show. But "12 Dates" is more than a good gig, more than a job she can count on from year to year.

"This has become a huge passion project for me," says Kalahurka, whose show opens a five-performance run Friday in Thomas More College Theatre in Crestview Hills. "I've experienced so many of the things that are in this show. This is hugely personal."

Don't be put off by that description. This is no agonized, chest-pounding exercise in ego. In fact, there's a good deal of hilarity in Ginna Hoben's script.

Kalahurka plays Mary, a 30-ish woman who has spent the past year recovering from the Thanksgiving from hell. While watching Macy's Thanksgiving Parade on TV, Mary spotted her fiancé madly making out with another woman. Predictably, it wasn't her finest holiday season.

In the course of the next year, Mary has slowly eased her way back into a world of dating. And it is that year of dates – alternately humorous, painful and heartbreaking – that makes up the heart of the show.

But this year, Kalahurka's "12 Dates" very nearly didn't happen.

The show was scheduled to be presented by New Edgecliff Theatre in its new performance space in old St. Patrick's Church on Blue Rock Street in Northside. But by late October, it became apparent that the renovation wouldn't be done in time. So NET's producing artistic director Jim Stump contacted Kalahurka and told her that they would have to cancel the engagement.

"I think she went through a mourning period," says Liz Smith, who is directing the production for its new space. "But that only lasted a week or so."

In her best hey-kids-let's-put-on-a-show tradition, Kalahurka decided to produce the show herself. Otherwise, she's spend the holidays twiddling her thumbs. It was late October, so it was too late for to find another acting job.

"I'm an actor," says Kalahurka. "This is my business. And if she show was canceled, that's money not in my pocket."

Admittedly, it's been a bit of a scramble getting the show together. They had to start from scratch. They needed a theater. And then promotion. And a lighting designer. And a stage manager. NET loaned them the old set, which was little more than a couple of chairs and stools, a wooden chest and a Christmas tree.

"Annie and I are painting the stage black tonight," says Smith.

As productions go, "12 Dates" has relatively simple technical demands.

The toughest element is the acting. And Kalahurka has done the role so much that it has become second nature to her.

But the show will be different, she promises.

"The first year I did this, I was just a year out of a breakup, like the character in the show," says Kalahurka. "The show ended up being so intense for me."

But it's more than the passage of time that has changed the tone of her performance. It's having Smith as a collaborator.

"This is the first time I've had a female director for this piece," says Kalahurka. The first year, Miami University theater professor Lewis Magruder directed. Last year, it was NET's Stump.

It's not that male directors were incapable of understanding what the character was going through.

"But this is a woman's story," says Kalahurka. "When I started working on the script the first time, I remember thinking that over the years, I have basically lived so much of this show. I have gone on these dates. I got it. And Liz gets it the same way I do. I don't think I've ever been so happy and satisfied with this show. I can't wait."