

12 Dates of Rowdy Good Fun!

One of my new “grown-up” Holiday traditions is to venture over to Staunton and catch a Christmas show at American Shakespeare Center’s Blackfriars theatre. There are three shows running in repertory during the season: the traditional and family friendly, “A Christmas Carol” (Bah Humbug! I am more in the anti-Christmas Camp this year.), the wickedly funny, modern classic, “Santaland Diaries” by David Sedaris and an original play by one the ASC’s alums, Ginna Hoben called, “The 12 Dates of Christmas“. The latter two plays are “adult only” shows and though, I adore “The Santaland Diaries” , this year, under my personal circumstances of being single and dating, I chose to invite a few female friends to laugh with me at Hoben’s saga of a woman (ironically) named Mary’s year long dating recovery following a break-up of what she thought was a committed relationship.

The play begins with Mary (played by ASC regular, Allison Glenzer) happily engaged and watching the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade from the comfy environs of her family’s suburban Ohio home. After witnessing her fiancée

sucking face with an office mate on national television, she embarks on a journey of healing self discovery as reflected through dating encounters with 12 men. Accompanied by the Doo Wop Girls, Bridget Rue and Molly Gilman, who accent various scenes with A Capella seasonally appropriate songs, Genzer bowls through the material like a bull in a china closet giving the audience a full range of emotional experience with her signature un-subtle style.

The ASC stage is Glenzer's home. She is adept at engaging the audience and rolling with whatever comes her way and masterfully manipulates responses both planned and unplanned as is dictated by Hoben's script. At one point (as per the script) she invites patrons to help her (Mary) decide whether or not she should kiss her longtime- male -friend-turned- surprise-date on New Year's Eve eliciting raucous opinions from the crowd causing a rousing reaction to her decision and the disastrous results thereof. But one of the best moments of the evening was an unsolicited response when Mary was "slapped" by one of the Doo Wop Girls and a white haired, upper-middle-aged woman seated in a stage seat shouted rather gleefully, "Bitch Slap!". The audience erupted leaving the Doo Wops and Glenzer frozen onstage trying hard not to burst out in gut bursting laughter as well. Glenzer, in the proper timing was able to recover and continue with aplomb, using the energy generated by the women's surprising response to drive the scene.

I like this show because we watch as Mary goes from shell shocked to centered while covering a myriad of dating

scenarios which are sadly, all too fresh in my mind. There is the great guy too soon post break-up for whom she is not ready, the overly attentive planner, the non-planner, the cougar moment, the stalker, the musician, the long suffering friend date, etc. With each experience she becomes a little wiser, more self-aware. Watching this parade of potential partners from a viewers perspective reminds me that when things don't work out in a dating situation that it is often no one's fault it just is the result of bad timing, incompatibility or some other innocuous factor. This message is helpful to the dater in search of a long-term committed relationship in terms of keeping a positive attitude in the face of what sometimes feels like daunting odds. In short, it gives hope.

And isn't hope what Christmas is really all about?

So if you prefer to have your Christmas message wrapped in a show with a punch more like a vodka tonic than a sugary sweet candy cane, "12 Dates" is for you - whether you are dating or not.