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Review: BoarsHead's 'Bad Dates' avoids one-character pitfalls

By LEN KLUGE

Theater, on rare and magnificent occasions, can work toward two ideal ends: It can change the way you think, feel and behave, and it can generate a living, breathing, caring relationship with a complete stranger. Theresa Rebeck's "Bad Dates," BoarsHead Theater's current production, does the latter.

Single-character plays are fraught with pitfalls, the most dangerous of which is to make actors impatient. When facing 500 staring eyeballs, a lone actor can be overwhelmed by the impulse to jerk the audience's chain at warp speed for the next hour and a half. The slightest lull can incite an actor's brain to scream, "louder, faster, faster, louder."

'Bad Dates'
BoarsHead Theater
425 S. Grand Ave,
Lansing
Continues through
Feb. 12
\$15-\$30
(517) 484-7805

In "Dates," those screams remain subdued and every pause becomes a transitional highlight for what is to follow, thanks to the consummate partnership of actor and director. Maggie Carney introduces you to her "Haley Walker" and allows you to get to know her as intimately as you will allow yourself to reciprocate. Director Kristine Thatcher orchestrates this "date" with the sensitive touch of a matchmaking maestro. Her off-stage scenes are as vivid as anything that happens on stage.

Set in a perfectly realistic New York City apartment, flawlessly designed by Kirk Domer, "Dates" is a rather ordinary tale of a single mom restaurateur returning to the dating scene following a prolonged absence. Obsessed with selecting the perfect dating outfit, accented by the "cutest" pair of shoes ("these hurt, but they fit"), Carney's Haley invites us along for each encounter's aftermath. And then there's the cash filled shoebox. Not to worry — Carney and Thatcher let us in on that mystery in good time — very good time, in fact, with a variety of pacing and a mix of humor and poignancy as natural as any conversation with an old (new) friend. "Bad Dates" is not an earth-shattering experience, but it will make you laugh, groan, and remember. Contrary to the title, it's a very good date.

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