

# Pining in a Pear Tree

## Columbus native unleashes her inner nutcracker in one-woman play, *The Twelve Dates of Christmas*

By Sean Edgar

Dec. 1, 2012

Ginna Hoben doesn't look like the type of woman that needs help finding a date. Despite a magnesium-glow smile and a profile that resembles Laura Linney's Midwestern twin, the Columbus-bred actress and playwright endured a decade of romantic misadventures that inform her bittersweet one-woman play, *The Twelve Dates of Christmas*. As Hoben explains it, the inspiration for her coming-of-age carol started with a three-year-relationship that yielded no golden rings, let alone five.

"I was like 'F\*ck you clown, I'm out of here,'" Hoben says with a grin. "He was a commitaphobe. We spent years running in circles. It went on and on until 2009 when I said, 'I can't do this anymore.'"

The commitaphobe in question became Hoben's husband one year later, after she presented him with the pink slip of love. For that year of singlehood, though, Hoben compiled her dating horror stories into the autobiographical journey of Mary, an NYC Everygirl who runs a gauntlet of heartbreak and belly laughs after dumping her fiancé. The holiday play has found life on nine different stages this season alone, including productions in England and China.

Hoben's narrative draws from her experience as a traveling actress throughout the United States. After attending Bishop Hartley for high school and Wright State for a BFA in acting, she migrated through Los Angeles, Penn State, and Chicago, to her current home of New York with an intervening stint at The American Shakespeare Center in Virginia. Each of these layovers lace *Twelve Dates* with juicy anecdotes. Hoben experienced "the best dating of her life" in Chicago, but had significant trouble finding any angels in L.A.

"Let me say, the worst dates in my play are based on what happened 10 years ago when I was living in Los Angeles; it's the haven of bad dates," she said. "One guy literally ended up being a stalker. He was calling to the point where I had to change my phone number ..."

Stalking aside, the worst offense in *Twelve Dates* is admittedly fictional: Mary discovers her fiancé getting down with a co-worker on national television during The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

"Every situation that comes up is based on a real-life event that happened either to me or somebody close to me. So I stole a couple of funny stories, but most of the characters have been recreated for more dramatic purpose."

The kernel of truth behind the above incident is just as surreal as its dramatization: shortly after dumping her future husband Sheffield, Hoben tuned into the televised parade to see her ex parading on stage as part of the Broadway production of *White Christmas*. "There he was in front of thousands of people, and we

had just broken up.”

Though her old flame eventually begged forgiveness and they exchanged nuptials two years ago, Hoben hasn't had any problems channeling her former bachelorette fury.

“It's a perspective that I held for a long time, and it does take a while to get back into it, but it's just like any play. When it gets time to get back into the character, you look at what the character wants, what is against the character, and you do your homework. You get there when the lights come up.”

With a narrative about female empowerment that carries the unofficial tag line, “the poor girl's Sex and the City,” I ask Hoben if her audiences tend to lack a Y chromosome, and if guys do frequent her show, are they mistle-towed by a lady friend. Providing the sage observation that “we've all had bad dates,” she launches into a story of how six college “dudes” snuck into one of her performances 10 minutes late. Were they there of their own volition? Not exactly. Hoben learned that they were university students tasked with reviewing a local production. But the reviews were unanimously positive – so much so that one of them earned a place on Hoben's refrigerator.

“I don't think it's from a female perspective: I think it's everybody trying to connect. And it's got some good punch lines.”

*The Twelve Dates of Christmas will run through December 23rd at CATCO Studio Three, Riffe Center. 77 S High St. For tickets and more information, visit [www.catco.org](http://www.catco.org).*