

The Observer Sarasota, FL

Valentine's Day Best Bet

By: Observer Staff February 14, 2013

Ginna Hoben is a New York playwright and actress coming to Sarasota as part of the Hermitage Artist Retreat this evening to read excerpts from a play that's fitting for Valentine's Day. When executives at Hermitage were scheduling the artist visits, Hoben had two dates in mind— Christmas and Valentine's Day. But December is her busiest month, so "The Twelve Dates of Christmas" was penciled in February 14. "It's a love story to ones self," Hoben explains. "It's about finding love and what makes you happy." The comedic plot takes place over a year and navigates the 30-year-old actress Mary's various holidays and her disastrous dating situations that occur. For instance, when Mary is on her way to meet her fiancé in Ohio, she sees a televised version of the Thanksgiving Parade where he is kissing another woman.

"Everything in the play is based on a kernel of truth either from my life or someone close to me," she says laughing, "(Granted), I have embellished, dramatized and made comic many of the situations that happened." And meeting her husband plays a big part. She feels really lucky to have had the happy ending that her dating life produced for her in her husband, fellow actor Sheffield Chastain. Interestingly enough, Chastain is also in Sarasota for Valentine's Day because he just finished up as a cast member in Florida Studio Theatre's "The Best of Enemies." He's going to see her reading tonight. But for Hoben, "Happy endings can be so many things, not just Prince Charming," she says. Much of this play is about being a single woman and asking the question what's going to happen? It's about the feeling of isolation when everyone else around you is happy and in love. "I slip into the mind of a single me when I read it," she says. Regardless of your own dating status, it's a story that will answer to those celebrating Valentine's Day and Anti-Valentine's Day.

If You Go: Valentine program featuring playwright Ginna Hoben Presented by: Hermitage Artist Retreat and the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art **When:** 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 14 **Where:** Historic Asolo Theater **Cost:** Free to \$5. Call 475-2