

## **'The 12 Dates of Christmas' at Next Stop Theatre, a jolly chronicle of romantic missteps**

The Washington Post

December 3, 2013

By Jessica Goldstein,

Playwright Ginna Hoben, a longtime fan of David Sedaris's "The SantaLand Diaries," knew she had something special to contribute to the holiday show canon. For one thing, whatever she wrote would create one more role for a woman during December; female parts in Christmas classics are few and far between. For another, she had some pretty ridiculous dating stories.

"My now-husband and I had just broken up, and a bunch of friends sort of rallied and set me up on these dates," Hoben said. "They all had a funny story attached to them."

Hoben's semi-autobiographical one-woman show at NextStop Theatre, "The 12 Dates of Christmas," is told through the eyes of Mary. Mary is watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade when she spots her fiance on the screen . . . making out with a colleague.

Hoben's romantic misadventures are inspired by her and her friends' experiences. Hoben would write about "anything that bordered on the unbelievable. Anything that happened to me that made people say, 'SHUT UP. That didn't happen.' The most far-out: That's what made it in. And there were also some that sort of wrote themselves."

Hoben met her husband at a wedding in 2005. She was seated between him and another guy; both asked for her phone number. "I went out with the first guy on Friday and my husband on Saturday," she said.

"I realize that I've written, for lack of a better term, a chick flick," said Hoben, who lives in Astoria, Queens. "It really resonates with a lot of women. But what I've found so rewarding is how many men have been moved and driven to tears through laughter because they've related to the material so much. Because men and women are on these dates together. It was important to me not to paint the man as the bad guy."

Although Hoben's work is personal, she was adamant that it "go out and be performed by other women. I know what it's like to not have work, to not have roles. This year, 11 women will be employed just because I wrote this play." And that's just the actors, Hoben said: Abigail Isaac is directing.

"12 Dates" is local actress Kari Ginsburg's first one-woman show. Ginsburg, 32, grew up in Rockville and has been involved in professional theater since childhood, singing for eight seasons with the Washington Opera at the Kennedy Center and working as an acting company member at WSC Avant Bard. But a year and a half

ago, she decided to take a break from theater. She returned with “The Full Monty” at Keegan Theatre in May.

“I thought it would be a really remarkable challenge to create a new legacy of female storytelling around the holiday season,” Ginsburg said. “Because there isn’t a lot of solo female stage work around the holidays. I think a lot of the most beloved stories that we have — like “A Christmas Carol” — are sort of male-focused.”