

Why THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS?

by David Ceccarini



Playwright & Original Performer Ginna Hoben

You, our loyal patrons, have enjoyed Next Act for many years for many reasons, one being our choice of plays. You have said often that you like plays which deal with contemporary issues, or various challenges that we all wrestle with as human beings. While not always, these plays may tend to be on the serious side, though any good playwright will inject a good bit of levity and heart into his or her arguments. We have found, however, that it's a tricky marketing challenge to encourage patrons – especially those new to Next Act – to play with us during the holiday season.

HOLIDAY SURPRISE

That brings me to our next offering, Ginna Hoben's *THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS*. Ms. Hoben is an established actress, with a host of classical and contemporary credits, including lots of Shakespeare. She has performed

her semi-autobiographical piece many times in numerous venues, honing and polishing its humor and heart into a bright theatrical gem. *TWELVE DATES* is a delightful and surprising combination of events and characters, told with an irreverent wit, that will resonate with any woman who's pursued meaningful relationships or had her heart destroyed in the process. And, by the way, well worth an attentive ear from us guys, who might gain new insight on the prospects and perils of dating from a woman's point of view.

PERFECT FIT

Our storyteller is Susie Duecker, a Next Act newcomer but already prominent in the local theater scene, having logged appearances with Renaissance Theaterworks, The Milwaukee Rep, First Stage and others. Susie, with bright eyes and boundless energy, has auditioned for Next Act a couple of times before, and I'm glad that we finally get to work together. In her own words, speaking about the main character, Mary: "This woman IS me." And further: "I LOVE that she is so witty, sassy, smart, and com-

pletely relatable. She gives a very real and hilarious voice to what women feel all the time - heartbreak, inadequacy, being overwhelmed, rage at the world, devotion, resilience, commitment, courage, and big fat love."



Susie Duecker

Without giving too much away, there is an element of redemption in *TWELVE DATES*, which is one important quality that I seek in these November-December plays. At the end of her dating odyssey, Mary has not yet found her soul mate, dream-partner or Mr. Right, but she has discovered a certain calm within herself that will soften heartbreak and boost courage. Mary finds her holiday peace, a gift which is bound to touch us all. As Susie Duecker puts it, "The take-away for me is that even on the darkest of days when you can't pull yourself up, there is STILL goodness and hope."

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We have great news for patrons who require a hearing boost while attending our shows. Long-time supporter Milan Racic has honored his beloved late wife Gordana with a generous memorial gift. In part, these proceeds have been used to install a state-of-the-art Induction Loop listening system at Next Act. This will bring a greatly **improved listening experience for patrons who have special “T-coil” hearing aids, as well as those who rely on conventional sound augmentation.** The Loop installation replaces our older radio signal system, and offers a much better quality of sound with far less background noise.



T-coil listeners simply need to switch their aids to the Loop setting. For conventional listeners, handy receiver packs with headphones are available at *Charles' Place*, the concessions bar. The same

strong sound will be available through either method of listening. We hope you take advantage of this terrific improvement and find you enjoy Next Act's intimate brand of theatre even more!

Many, many thanks to Milan for his tremendous generosity. We believe that Gordana would have heartily endorsed this thoughtful and practical gift. Special thanks is also due to Nancy Einhorn, for her advocacy and support of this project.



Photo: Timothy Mader

Gordana Racic

Why *TWELVE DATES*, continued

EXTRA MUSICAL FUN

In prefacing remarks in her *TWELVE DATES* script, Ms. Hoben suggests including backup singers and some musical interjections. We are running with Ginna's suggestion and including our own Doo-Wop Duo, The Doherty Sisters. Sisters in name only, Kelly and Marcee have teamed up many times in their own cabaret act, and so will come primed and ready to add to the fun. They will add comment and conversation with their musical interludes and help Mary tell her story. [See *The Doherty Sisters*, page 3]

Underscoring the entire production is Milwaukee's own musical gem, Mr. Jack Forbes Wilson. Jack's last appearance with Next Act was in *GROUCHO*:

A LIFE IN REVUE, where he orchestrated the play into a glorious musical celebration. Before that, he had also made musical magic with our special radio production of *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*. We're ecstatic to have Jack back. [See close-up Jack Wilson article, page 4]

TRADITION PLUS

Holiday times are filled with tradition, with familiarity and family. There are plenty of classic stories offered by our performing arts colleagues, enough to please thousands of people. The impressive feat that *THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS* can pull off is that it honors and celebrates a year's worth of holiday tradition, yet tells the story from Mary's unique and offbeat point of view. We get something old, and something new, in one fantastic package. And the Doo-Wop Duo with Jack Wilson as the icing on our cake.

See you at the theatre.

David C.



Ginna Hoben

THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS is described as a one-woman show, but our lead, Susie Duecker, won't be the only performer. We are excited to welcome The Doherty Sisters, a cue we have taken from the script itself. In her Production Notes, playwright Ginna Hoben explains, "The soundscape of the play is essentially its own character." Hoben describes a version of the show in which all the singing is provided by "The Doo-Wop Girls" – in our version, Kelly Doherty and Marcee Doherty-Elst, known as The Doherty Sisters.



Marcee & Kelly as The Doherty Sisters
Photo: Pear Photography

We'll let you in on a little secret: The Doherty Sisters aren't actually sisters. While Marcee is from Milwaukee, Kelly (who played Williamina Fleming in last year's *SILENT SKY*) came here by way of Minnesota, Madison and UW-Whitewater. Sometimes they say they are cousins, but they tell the truth in the opening of their cabaret.

About eight years ago, they both auditioned for the same role; the part was offered to Kelly, but she wasn't able to accept due to scheduling conflicts. Later, a friend of hers said they saw that Kelly was in the show but the company got her name wrong, that the billing said "Marcee Doherty." After a year of them both wondering "Who is the other Doherty girl?" they finally met when Marcee saw Kelly in *SWEET CHARITY*, and about five years ago, they really got to know each other in *THE PENELOPIAD* with Luminous Theatre, their first production together.

Even after watching them for just a couple of minutes, you would think that they were sisters; they finish each other's sentences and speak concurrently on the same thought. They know the other's personality and style so well, they swap pieces from their closets and tell embarrassing stories



Kelly as Williamina Fleming in *SILENT SKY*, 2017
Photo: Ross Zentner

about each other (and themselves). It's easy to see that this banter provides great entertainment for their cabarets.

The first of The Doherty Sisters cabarets was produced in November of 2014 as a rental at Next Act; UPROOTED Theatre approached Kelly about doing a cabaret, and she pitched the idea to Marcee. They now have a Valentine's show (*THE QUEENS OF HEARTS*), an Andrews Sisters tribute, and their main attraction *FULL FRONTAL DOHERTY AND EVERYTHING ELST* in which they play heightened versions of themselves in a musical theatre-style telling of their lives.

THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS is their second Christmas show together. It is also Marcee's second appearance with Susie Duecker, with whom she starred in Renaissance's *DROWNING GIRLS*. Her love for Next Act is what drew Kelly to *TWELVE DATES*; she even agreed to do the show before reading the script. Marcee is looking forward to spending time with a theatre family for the holidays, and and they both anticipate collaborating with Jack and David to create that musical "character" for the show. And we look forward to having you here to see their final product!



Susie Duecker, Marcee & Elyse Edelman in *DROWNING GIRLS* at Renaissance Theaterworks
Photo: Ross Zentner

He played the cello, briefly, when we first worked together back in 1983. He also tooted recorders and crumhorns, the reedy, nasal musical must-haves for Shakespearean and Elizabethan festivals worldwide. No doubt, many other instruments have come alive in his gifted hands. But what he has always loved are the keys; the 88 keys, white and black, housed in electronic boxes brimming with switches and dials and USB sockets, or, the 88 wooden keys balanced perfectly on pins within polished, massive, triple-legged enclosures strung with wire, 2 or 3 to the note.

Along with the young, vibrant Susie Duecker – featured in our production of *THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS*, is one of Milwaukee's hidden musical treasures, Jack Forbes Wilson. As he has done for so many theatre productions, Jack will play, he will sing, and most importantly, he will create the musical framework and fabric of *TWELVE DATES*, from scratch. As well as being a terrific pianist, Jack's instincts and ability to arrange the musical accompaniment of an entire script is one of his deepest, most unique and enduring talents.



David & Jack in GROUCHO: A LIFE IN REVUE, 2013

FROM THE NEBRASKA PLAINS

Though Jack has been around Milwaukee for over 30 years, we almost missed him. Jack grew up in Nebraska, and attended college at the U. of Nebraska, pursuing a double major in chemistry and psychology. Having grown up playing and studying piano, he says, "I put myself through school by giving piano lessons and playing in rock bands." But, apparently, the academic combination of mind over chemical matter wasn't going to fulfill Jack's future. He looked up an old acquaintance – well, a master pianist Jack had met while still a music camp teenager at Colorado's Rocky Ridge Music Center near Boulder. The esteemed Professor Howard Karp had recently assumed leadership of UW-Madison's School of Music, and Jack asked Professor Karp to

grant him the privilege of studying the piano under his tutelage.

This intense course of study exploded Jack's piano skills – in a great way – while also bringing him to Madison. From there, in 1983, it was a short journey out to Spring Green, where a new classical theatre was using musicians playing live music for their productions. APT is where I met the incomparable Jack Forbes Wilson. As a matter of fact, our first "show" together was a community music effort: singing Handel's Messiah at a Mazomanie church.

JUST THE SUMMER

Jack made his way to Milwaukee in 1986, to spend a summer working with Dale Gutzman's theatre troupe, but as he says, "My summer has lasted over 30 years – I'm still here!" In the fall, Jack began teaching piano in the Milwaukee Public School system. "Honestly, I came home every night and cried. Visiting school to school, I was teaching 20 kids playing on an out-of-tune piano in a gym, while a dodgeball game was actually going on at the other end! I loved it too, but it was really difficult."

TO WAR

Jack and I teamed up with Theatre Tesseract for the remarkable Canadian cabaret-play, *BILLY BISHOP GOES TO WAR*, in early 1988. Jonathan Smoots was directing and Norman Moses dropped in a few times – with his infant Kelsey in the car seat – to provide some of Billy's "Lovely Helene" boogie choreography. *BILLY BISHOP* bonded Jack and me together for life. He took a threadbare set of score sheets, sketchy chords and jumbled lyrics, and produced a full arrangement for all the songs, underscore and, especially, the air combat action sequences. We combined John Gray's words, my kid-like flying and machine gun sounds and Jack's dramatic piano narrative into some really fun and intense WWI dogfights, with nothing more than a spotlight and a walking cane for support. Billy and The Piano Play-



David & Jack in BILLY BISHOP GOES TO WAR, 1995

er appeared many times around Wisconsin, in snippets for fundraising efforts, or in full productions at Next Act, Beloit College, St. Croix Festival Theatre and twice for flyers at the EAA convention in Oshkosh. There is a lurking danger that we just might put the old band back together and bring the WWI Canadian ace out for one last flight. It would be fun; hopefully!

Meanwhile, Jack's career did not, by any means, rely only upon the success of our Canadian flying circus. He had found a brighter teaching home, with the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. And, not long after Billy Bishop II at Next Act in 1995, Jack accompanied Kay Stiefel for her *TOM FOOLERY* audition at The Milwaukee Rep. "Kay didn't get the part, but they gave me the accompanist's job for that show in the Stackner Cabaret. Eventually, they hired Kay and me for our own shows there. We had a ball."



Jack & Debra Babich in IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, 2012

Photo: Alex Clark

OUR MAN FROM WEST ALLIS

After more success at the Stackner, opportunity came knocking with the perfect project that would harness all of Jack's talent, energy and charisma. The Rep had hired a performer to play Liberace in an existing play, but the actor had to back out of the commitment. "MRT Associate Artistic Director Brent Hazelton was slated to direct the show, and he knew my work well from our past collaborations. Thinking that I could be a good candidate for the flamboyant entertainer from West Allis, Brent and the MRT staff decided that they would write their own *LIBERACE*, with me on the piano seat."

I saw Jack do that show and he was spectacular. Of course, thousands more came to that same conclusion. Acting, singing, and so much wonderful piano: from first note to last, it was playful, outrageous, touching and masterful. "That was a lot of hard, exacting work, I can tell you. Liberace had great piano chops and I couldn't fake those pieces or his style of playing. I don't think I'd practiced that hard since my days with Professor Karp!"

AT NEXT ACT

Jack's most recent Next Act appearances were in 2012 and 2013. In our version of *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*, adapted by Mary MacDonald Kerr, Jack was one of the six radio players – notably playing Clarence the guardian angel – and of course the studio musician who knitted the broadcast together with grace and precision. Then the following year, Jack became our back-up band for *GROUCHO: A LIFE IN REVUE*. We had extra fun creating Chico's piano duet interlude that eventually careened off the rails with an impossible finishing flourish. Suddenly, Billy and The Piano Player were back in business.

As he continues his theatrical career, Jack maintains his piano student roster. His one, constant goal, in what he describes as "my completely unplanned life," seems to be to open the door of music to any young person who's curious and willing to take a step through. Apparently, all the great entertainment value he has added to local stages over the years has been our bonus.

Thanks, Jack, for extending your nice, long summer stay in Milwaukee.



Jack as Liberace in The Milwaukee Rep's LIBERACE at The Stackner Cabaret

What is the Producer's Circle? A group of individuals who invest in the success of Next Act by donating \$1,000 or more each year.

What makes you feel special? Here at Next Act, Producer's Circle members make us feel special. You are at the heart of Next Act, keeping the beat going strong for the mission and supporting the high caliber work patrons demand.

We love to celebrate the Producer's Circle and periodically invite members to join us behind the scenes for a special treat. In September, Producer's Circle members enjoyed a special reception on their behalf, a sneak peek of rehearsal for *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR*, a conversation with the director and cast, and a tour of the set as it was being installed.



Board President Cathy Jakicic with George & Eileen Stone, above David Ceccarini addressing the Producer's Circle, below Photos: Timothy Moder



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Do you need to make a mandatory withdrawal (required minimum distribution) from your IRA account? Good news: Tax laws allow you to donate your withdrawal, tax-free, when it goes directly to a charitable 501(c)3 organization. Make your support of Next Act go further and keep your tax bill low.

Consult your tax advisor and learn more at www.nextact.org/support/ira-distributions



In THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS

the power of a child's innocence brings clarity to an adult's seemingly complicated life. That same child-centric clarity is a sought after quality for many adult artists. It is a quality of not only innocence, but one of spontaneity without inhibition.

My first thought for the lobby gallery was to seek out an adult artist in touch with their "inner child" for this production's exhibit. However, I felt it would be even better to go to the source; to feature the art of young children instead. So, we sent out an invitation to Next Act Theatre's community of creative adults asking them to share cherished pieces created by their offspring, or, if they are not parents, art created by themselves at a very young age. The resulting show is sure to be a delight.

I hope the exhibit will inspire you to take the time to frame and display the art of your own children. Many of you have probably already done this, but, if not, I encourage you to do so. It doesn't have to be a fancy framing job. A simple, stock frame from Michael's or Target (or Goodwill!) can do the trick. Whatever you do, the transformation from refrigerator art to hung-on-the-wall art is amazing. And, the boost to your child's self esteem is priceless.

With the holidays already upon us, I hope you will not only treasure the art of your children, but embrace all of the qualities of innocence and simplicity it represents. We truly did learn everything we need to know in kindergarten!



Next On Tap... Returns for Another Season

There are over 20 breweries in Milwaukee. Who has time to check them all out? Don't worry! Next Act Theatre has you covered. **Join us the second Saturday of each production for Next On Tap.**

Your ticket includes three samples of beer from a local brewery, as well as admission to the play. Sample the Brew City and enjoy some of the best entertainment Milwaukee has to offer.



Next On Tap... MobCraft, our Walker's Point neighbors turning ideas into beers. In 2011, MobCraft founders Henry Schwartz and Andrew Gierczak dreamt up an idea for a crowdsourced brewery where the people decide what's brewed. Each month beer fans across the US submit ideas ranging from a couple flavors to tried and true homebrew recipes. The ideas go up for vote each month on the website, and the beer with the most votes is brewed, packaged and shipped.

Join us Saturday, November 24, at 7 PM for MobCraft and *THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS*. While we don't yet know what brews we'll be sampling, we guarantee it will be a unique experience only MobCraft could offer.



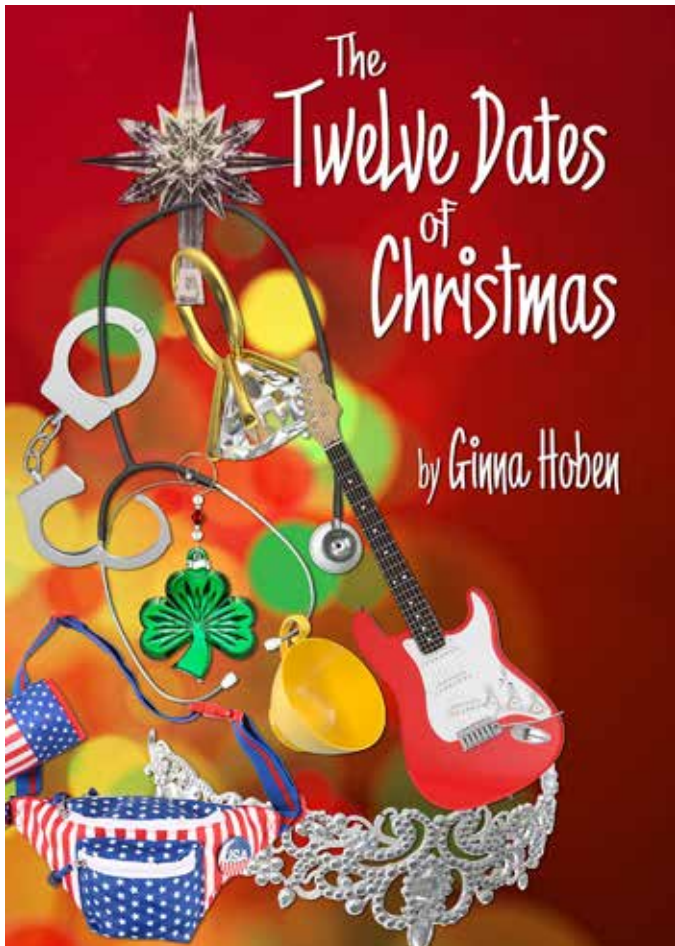
Next Act celebrates Pride Night at Next Act On Tap in November! In partnership with the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce, Milwaukee's LGBT Community Center and the UW-Milwaukee Resource Center.



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Dumped on Thanksgiving Day by her fiancé, Mary stumbles back into the dating world, where “romance” ranges from weird and creepy to absurd and comical. Over the course of an epic year of mismatches, Mary’s frustration grows. Fortunately, the charm and innocence of a five-year-old boy unexpectedly brings her a new outlook on life – just in time for Christmas. With a delightful musical backdrop delivered by The Doherty Sisters and Jack Forbes Wilson, this hilarious and heartwarming show will bring a cheery, change-of-pace glow to your holiday season.

“...a totally engaging hour and a half.” - *Reviewsgate.com*

NOVEMBER 15 - DECEMBER 9, 2018						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				15 Preview 7:30	16 Opening 7:30	17 4:30 8:00 P
18 T 2:00		20 7:30	21 1:30 7:30 P	Thanksgiving	23 7:30	24 4:30 8:00
25 P T 2:00			28 1:30 7:30	29 7:30 P T	30 7:30	1 4:30 8:00
2 2:00 P T	3 7:30 S		5 7:30	6 7:30 T	7 7:30 P	8 4:30 8:00
9 2:00 P T	P Personal Preview (Begins 30 minutes prior to curtain) T Talkback S Pay What You Can					

Directed by David Cecsarini
 Featuring Susie Duecker, Kelly Doherty, Marcee Doherty Elst
 Musical Director Jack Forbes Wilson

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