





THE QUESTORS THEATRE COMPANY

First performance February 20th 1979

Director's Note

The *Ghost Sonata* was written in 1907 for Strindberg's New Intimate Theatre which housed an audience of one hundred and sixty. This was an innovatory project, not only in exploring the complex themes of the 'Chamber' plays but also through a comparatively close actor/audience relationship which was in direct contrast with the large theatres of the period. In an attempt to enable present-day audiences to experience the intimacy which Strindberg felt was necessary for these late plays, the 'promenade' form seemed to me to be the most powerful. Within this form the 'feverish nightmare' could perhaps become a nightmare for each member of the audience?

In 'Promenade' Theatre, the actors shape the space within which the audience enclose them. The audience become actual witnesses to the action, they are 'present' in the square, the round room, the hyacinth room. In 'Promenade' Theatre the audience physically envelope the characters. The 'fluid' nature of 'Promenade' Theatre necessitates no territorial rights for the actors — the spaces they use are just as much those of the audience. The actors do not, in the conventional sense, reach out to the audience, rather the audience reach out to the actors.

In effect — if you cannot see or hear, then find a place where you can.

What is shared between the characters in this play and the audience does not relate to the conventional actor/audience relationship but attempts to generate the power of life being lived at the pace of life itself, as well as the 'deformed reality' associated with Strindberg's expressionism. For the most part our nightmares, however bizarre, disturbing and horrific, are not a distancing experience but quite the opposite.

In our interpretation of the play I have been influenced by the following:

STRINDBERG, 1905 (Translated by Michael Meyer)

"Life is so horribly ugly, we human beings so utterly evil, that if a writer were to portray everything he saw and heard no one could bear to read it. There are things which I remember having seen and heard in good, respectable and well-liked people, but which I have blotted out from my mind because I could not bring myself to speak of them and do not wish to remember them. Breeding and education are only masks to hide our bestiality, and virtue is a sham. The best we can hope for is to conceal our wretchedness. Life is so cynical that only a swine can be happy in it; and any man who sees beauty in life's ugliness is a swine! Life is a punishment. A hell. For some a purgatory, for none a paradise. We are compelled to commit evil and to torment our fellow mortals."

ROBERT BRUSTEIN — 'Introduction to Strindberg, Selected Plays and Prose'

"Strindberg is no longer fighting God, he is still questioning Him, for he is still a rebel, raging against the awful limitations of his humanity. He has tried to escape from life into a realm of pure spirit, but he cannot resist the pulls of the body which drag him back into the filth, muck and flesh of the material world.

Strindberg, in fact, is becoming more and more obsessed with human grossness. His revulsion at dirt was inferentially suggested in *Miss Julie*; in his later works, his disgust is more openly expressed. In *The Ghost Sonata* it is 'the toil of holding the dirt of life at bay' which weighs down the



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The Ghost Sonata

by AUGUST STRINDBERG

translated by Michael Meyer

characters. The dirt of life is, of course, life itself, and especially the life of the flesh. For Strindberg's hatred of dirt is intimately bound up with his life-long disgust of the physical functions of man, especially the physical expression of love which he sees as a base animal act degrading a lofty spiritual feeling.

In the light of his attitude towards the body, Strindberg's commitment to a life of the spirit becomes a little clearer, for he tends to regard the physical world, to borrow John Marston's imagery, as 'the very muckhill on which the sublunary orbes cast their excrement'.

The genius of Strindberg lies in his ability to confront his feelings courageously. It is, in fact, the inescapable interdependence of body and spirit, lust and love, dirt and flowers, which forms the major theme of the later plays, where he tries to explore, in dramatic terms, the melancholy Yeatsian paradox; 'Love has pitched his mansion in the place of excrement.' He cannot affirm this paradox; he will no longer try to deny it. He will only try to understand it. But in this desperate effort at understanding, where Strindberg projects his tortured dualism onto the whole of his life, his existential rebellion finds its greatest expression".

INGMAR BERGMAN — "*The Ghost Sonata* is a feverish nightmare, the product of a man with a little poisonous spot inside him (the first symptoms of cancer that five years later would cause his death) which, like a foetus, slowly keeps growing — a man burning with vitality, not at all a madman, but on the contrary, an unusually wise man with tremendous experience of life."

CARL DAHLSTROM — 'Strindberg's dramatic expressionism'

"From our knowledge of expressionism we can readily see that in *The Ghost Sonata* the 'deformed reality' is dream distortion, or distortion that arises through inner experiences".

Tony Rushforth

CREW

<i>Stage Manager</i>	— JO PHELPS
<i>Deputy Stage Manager</i>	— BOB RICKET
<i>Assistants</i>	— SUE BAKER HOUSE SERVICES TEAM FIT-UP CREW
<i>Sound</i>	— CHARLES LACAILLE
<i>Props</i>	— IRIS PHELPS
<i>Lighting</i> <i>Assisted by</i>	— MALCOLM ROBERTSON SIMON SAPPER PHIL PAGE
<i>Make-up adviser</i>	— JULIE CRUTTENDEN
<i>Construction</i>	— VIC BARRELL BOB CHARLES
<i>Wardrobe</i>	— ANNA BOOTH HILDA COLLINS MAUD CULHANE EDITH RICKET

CAST

The Old Man	— NEVILE CRUTTENDEN
The Student	— ROBIN INGRAM
The Milkmaid	— DOROTHY BOYD TAYLOR
The Caretaker's Wife	— CAROL METCALFE
The Dead Man	— PETER FIELD
The Dark Lady	— MICHELE MIKARDO
The Colonel	— ALFRED EMMET
The Mummy	— MARY HODLIN
The 'Colonel's Daughter'	— MARY DAVIES
The Nobleman	— KEN RATCLIFFE
Johansson	— NED GETTINGS
Bengtsson	— PATRICK BACON
The Fiancée	— BARBARA HUTCHINS
The Cook	— INGRAM HOOD
The Maidservant	— ANNA MARIA ASHE
The Beggars	— JULIA COOKE
	JILLYANN HEALY
	DAVID EMMET
	SIMON SURTEES
	FRANK WYSE

<i>Directed by</i>	TONY RUSHFORTH
<i>Set designed by</i>	NIGEL COWELL
<i>Costumes designed by</i>	MAUD CULHANE
<i>Song Accompaniment played by</i>	DON KINCAID

**Strindberg's Answers to a Questionnaire:
May, 1897**

- 1 What is the predominant trait in your character?
This strange mixture of the deepest pessimism and utter
recklessness.
- 2 What quality do you rate highest in a man?
Lack of pettiness.
- 3 In a woman?
Motherliness.
- 4 What power would you most like to possess?
Power to solve the riddle of the world and the meaning of
life.
- 5 What fault would you be most unwilling to have?
Pettiness.
- 6 What is your favourite occupation?
Writing plays.
- 7 What would give you the greatest joy?
To hate no one and to have no enemies.
- 8 What position would you most like to have held?
That of a constantly performed dramatist.
- 9 What would you consider the greatest misfortune?
To lack inner peace and a quiet conscience.
- 10 Where would you prefer to live?
In the Stockholm skerries.
- 11 Your favourite colours?
Pale yellow and amethyst violet.
- 12 Your favourite flower?
Mountain violet.
- 13 Favourite creature?
Butterfly.
- 14 What are your favourite books?
The Bible, Chateaubriand's 'Génie du Christianisme',
Swedenborg's 'Arcana Celestia', Victor Hugo's 'Les
Misérables', Dickens' 'Little Dorrit', Andersen's Fairy Tales,
Bernardin de St. Pierre's 'Harmonies'.
- 15 Your favourite pictures?
Th. Rousseau: Paysages intimes, Böcklin: Isle of the Dead.
- 16 Favourite music?
Beethoven's Sonatas.
- 17 What English author do you place highest?
Dickens.
- 18 English painter?
Turner.
- 19 What historical figures do you place highest?
Henry IV of France and Bernard de Clairvaux.

- 20 Women in history?
Elisabeth of Thuringen and Margaret of Provence.
- 21 What character in history do you most despise?
One has no right to despise anyone.
- 22 What characters in fiction appeal to you most?
Balzac's Louis Lambert and the Bishop in 'Les Misérables'.
- 23 Women in fiction?
Margareta in 'Faust' and Balzac's Séraphita.
- 24 What name do you like best?
Margareta.
- 25 What fault in another do you most easily forgive?
Extravagance.
- 26 What social reform would you most like to see accomplished
in your lifetime?
Disarmament.
- 27 Your favourite drink and food?
Ale and fish dishes.
- 28 What season and what weather do you like best?
Full summer and warm rain.
- 29 Your motto?
Speravit infestis. (He hoped in adversity.)
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NEXT IN THE THEATRE

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

by Robert Bolt

March 10 - 17

In the Studio

DIVERSIONS

A Student Group Production

including plays by Ayckbourn, Pinter and Saunders.

February 26 - March 9

APRIL

In the Theatre

IT'S ALL FOR THE BEST

by Steve Gooch

April 6,7,8,19,20,21

Would you like to talk about this show? Or hear others talk about it?

Then come to the DISCUSSION which will be held in the BERNARD SHAW ROOM on

TUESDAY, 27th FEBRUARY at 7.45p.m.

led by

MICHAEL MEYER

Michael Meyer, whose translation of *The Ghost Sonata* you are seeing this evening, has made what are widely regarded as the definitive translations into English of most of Strindberg's plays. There is no one more knowledgeable to talk about Strindberg and his work for the theatre or about this play in particular. We are delighted, therefore, that Mr. Meyer has agreed to do so and to lead a discussion on our production. All are cordially invited.

TUESDAY, 27th FEBRUARY
