Music for Ghosts: Sonatas on Stage

One of the first things that the audience for *The Ghost Sonata* may notice is that this story is non-linear. That is to say that this story does not develop by cause and effect -- A doesn’t cause B and B doesn’t lead to C. There is a different kind of pattern at work here, and rather than explaining it step by step, we invite you to think of this play as a piece of music -- more specifically as a sonata.

There is a strong resemblance in structure and progression between a musical sonata and *The Ghost Sonata*. Ludwig van Beethoven’s famous “Moonlight Sonata” is often cited as a source of inspiration for *The Ghost Sonata*. In critic Bert Cardullo’s essay regarding the famous director Ingmar Bergman’s 1973 production of this play, Cardullo states that “Music is to drama as Heaven is to earth. Music is pure form, free, unlike the drama, of the illusions of natural forms, conceptual content, or moral purpose.” Many have surmised that August Strindberg intentionally used musical form to transcend the actions on stage and help the audience transcend the world portrayed in his play.
“Sonata” is a broad term that has only been developed and more clearly defined relatively recently. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians describes a sonata as “a term used to denote a piece of music usually but not necessarily consisting of several movements, almost invariably instrumental and designed to be performed by a soloist or small ensemble.” A sonata is broken into several sections or “movements”: the introduction, exposition, development, recapitulation, and the coda (a restatement of the introduction).

- The introduction (and later, the coda) is the first movement the listener hears, so it is the movement with which the listener will first associate the rest of the Sonata. It is, in its own way, the definition of the piece as a whole.

- The exposition is a movement different from and separate from the introduction.

- The development has many techniques but in general, it serves as the climax of the Sonata.

- The recapitulation is a way to revisit the theme of the first movement. The recapitulation does not simply repeat the introduction, it offers a new variation on it.

Over the course of the evening, we invite you to consider how our play might fit the sonata structure, and how this performance is in some ways like a piece of music.