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Originally published Thursday, April 17, 2008 at 12:00 AM

Print

"Ghost Sonata": A haunting exploration of darkness

To say that August Strindberg's "Ghost Sonata" is dark would be much like saying the sun is bright: The play, with its fatalistic view of...

By Leah B. Green
Special to The Seattle Times

Theater review

To say that August Strindberg's "Ghost Sonata" is dark would be much like saying the sun is bright: The play, with its fatalistic view of human nature and phantasmagoric obsession with death and decay, is the very definition of dark. Open Circle Theater and director Andy Justus tackle this heady, poetic dirge with no mercy, painting Strindberg's dark world with a palate that ranges from charcoal to obsidian.

In Strindberg's world, the nuclear family is but a repository for repression, beauty is a disguise for disease and heroism is futile. The characters of "Ghost Sonata" inhabit a surreal purgatory bridging the living and dead, acting out a fugue on human suffering.

The vortex in this whirlpool of misery comes in the form of the Old Man (Aaron Allshouse), a ruthless financier and general malcontent. Not willing to go gentle into that good night, the crippled Old Man sinks his claws into the bright-eyed Student (Andrew Perez), imparting his own education in human suffering as a final worldly deed.

The Student finds himself navigating murky, haunted waters at the mansion of the Colonel (Todd Hull), meeting the Colonel's lovely (if hopeless) daughter (Kenna Ketrick) amongst the unsavory, half-dead houseguests. An awkward dinner party ends in a waterfall of machinations and deceit.

Allshouse owns much of the action as the Old Man, whom he plays as a booming, desperate puppet master. As the Student, Perez successfully marks the replacement of wide-eyed optimism with world-wise bitterness.



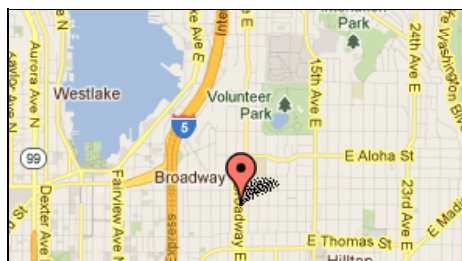
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Kenna Ketrick plays the Colonel's daughter, and Andrew Perez is the Student in "Ghost Sonata."

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Now playing "Ghost Sonata"

By August Strindberg, produced by Open Circle Theater, runs Fridays-Sundays through May 10, All Pilgrim's Church, 500 Broadway E., Seattle; \$10-\$15 (206-382-4250 or www.octheater.com).



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OC1's choice to stage this wordy, poetic classic (first staged 100 years ago) in the sanctuary of Capitol Hill's All Pilgrim's Church could either mitigate or heighten all this gloom, depending on your frame of mind. Lofty ceilings — and live organ and piano scoring — do give an echoed, haunted overtone to the text, though sometimes at the expense of understandable dialogue (Allshouse overcomes the handicaps of the space readily; the rest of the cast less so).



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Aesthetic gains largely make up for this linguistic loss, however, and several in the audience found themselves at pew's edge by play's end.

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