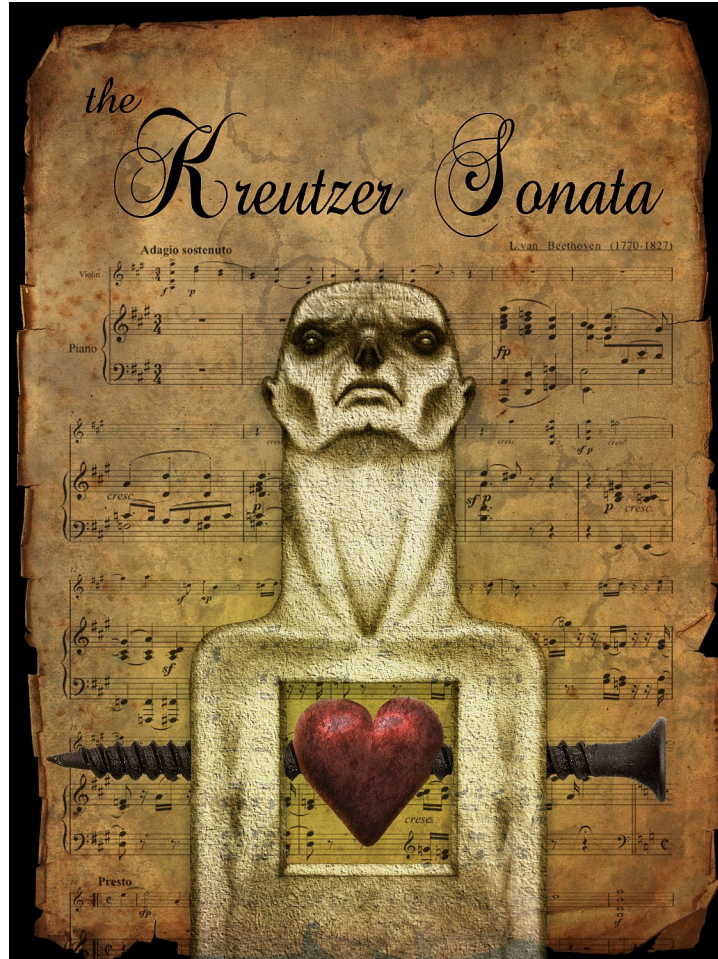


THE KREUTZER SONATA

freely adapted from Leo Tolstoy



by **Eric Samuelsen**



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Newport, Maine

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THE KREUTZER SONATA

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THE KREUTZER SONATA, freely adapted from Leo Tolstoy by Eric Samuelsen, received its world premiere October 18-November 9, 2015 at Plan-B Theatre Company in a co-production with NOVA Chamber Music Series. Designed by Phillip R. Lowe (costumes), Jesse Portillo (lighting) and Randy Rasmussen (set); stage managed by Joe Killian and directed by Jerry Rapier. Featuring violinist Kathryn Eberle, pianist Jason Hardink and actor Robert Scott Smith. *THE KREUTZER SONATA* was also performed at United Solo in New York.

COMPANY:

POZDNYSHEV

A VIOLINIST

A PIANIST

TIME: Then and now

SETTING: The mind of a madman

NOTE: Bracketed throughout [] are the excerpts used from Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 9, aka The Kreutzer Sonata.

THE KREUTZER SONATA Freely adapted from Leo Tolstoy's novella by Eric Samuelsen 1M 1Violinist, 1Pianist. A harrowing exploration of the mind of a murderer, a man driven mad by unfulfilled passions – and Beethoven's music. This cautionary tale of rage, revenge and remorse is interwoven with a live performance of Beethoven's sonata on violin and piano. The music is the key to an act of murder. Of course, that murder is an unspeakable act of utterly unjustifiable barbarism. But, at least, we have to understand why it's such a trigger for him, why it launches him to act so horrifically. But we also have to retain our own civilization, our own sense of the beauty of Beethoven's accomplishment and our own compassion for the lost souls Tolstoy created. Tolstoy's protagonist cannot hear the remarkable violin sonata Beethoven wrote for the violinist Kreutzer with anything like the aesthetic distance with which even the most engaged listeners today encounter it. To him, the piece is a monstrosity, provoking passions that cannot find fulfillment, literally maddening. Without Beethoven's music, Pozdnyshev's marriage would remain his own personal nightmare. Add Beethoven, and it becomes an incitement to rage, to fury, and to murder. *The Mind of a Murderer Driven Mad!* Premiered by Salt Lake City's Plan-B Theatre Company in 2015. **ORDER #3274**

Eric Samuelsen taught at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 1992. He became head of the Playwriting program at BYU in 1999. He has also taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Religion department. He retired from BYU in 2012.

As a playwright, Samuelsen has had twenty-seven plays professionally produced in Utah, Indiana, Louisiana, New York, and California. Some of his plays include *Gadianton*, which has seen three professional productions across the country, *A Love Affair with Electrons*, *Family*, *The Plan*, and *The Way We're Wired*. He is resident playwright at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, who designated their 2013-14 season a 'Season of Eric, including productions of six of his plays.

He is a member of the Playwrights' Circle, and the Dramatists Guild. He is three-time winner of the Annual Award in Playwriting offered by the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) and he became president of AML in 2007. In 2013 the organization awarded him the Smith Pettit Award for his lifetime work as a playwright.

He has been a staff writer for the on-line satirical magazine *The Sugarbeet*. He was also featured in the book *Conversations with Mormon Authors*, edited by Chris Bigelow. He is a noted Ibsen translator, and has also published scholarly articles on 19th and 20th century Scandanavian Theatre, and more recently, on LDS drama and film. He blogged at Mormoniconoclast.com. Eric died in September of 2019 after a long battle with polymyositis. This has left a huge hole in the Theatre Community within, and outside of, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

THE KREUTZER SONATA

[Opening chord, cut off by Pozdnyshev]

POZDNY SHEV: Let us begin with what will seem like an absurdity. I intend to speak truth about music, but it is a truth that you will not believe, a truth you can only experience, as I have experienced it. Music is frightful. It can lead to terrible acts; it seduces men to commit them. The Chinese are right to ban it. And I have the right to insist that you listen, because of what I have done.

That sonata, the Kreutzer. Tempting, promising what it cannot satiate. Creating an empty longing. Music, like marriage, is but violence and falsehood. Ah, but you say, don't speak nonsense: music is beauty, marriage is love; both are ultimate goodness. How dare you intimate that music builds to violence, that marriage is torment...torment...

I was once deluded, as you are. But I have come to know the truth.

[Movement I, 1-4]

I'll grant you that some music is useful. A dance is played, I dance, and the music ends. A soldier drills to a march, and then the band is finished. Sacred music beckons; I receive the sacrament, and again it is over. We feel what we're meant to feel, and we act as we should.

But Beethoven. The Kreutzer, and especially the presto. I do not share his pain, cannot know his desire. So his music provokes an excitement that can never appease, a void never filled. Building, building, excitement building, and always and forever unsatiated. Building. Building. Then . . .

Listen as I listen; see as I see. Listen, hear an incitement to violence, a prelude to horror. Listen as I listen, hear what I hear. You'll need an entire movement, the first, to feel it entirely. Watch, learn. Listen.

[Movement I, 5-end; we see Pozdnyshev listen (if performed without live musicians, trim judiciously)]

Let me tell you who I am. Let me tell you how, and why, I killed my wife.

I married in my thirtieth year. Before then, I lived the life of other wealthy men: in debauchery. I dreamed of high and poetic perfection. My wife virginally pure, our conjugal life; stainless. While I practiced the most loathesome vileness, always paying for the privilege; a jewel, a bauble, a trinket. Yes, I killed my wife, but you must know this: I killed The Wife, the ideal, and only afterward did I kill My Wife. I was buried in rottenness, while imagining purity. As are we all, we respectable men; rotten and deluded.

My wife was one of two daughters of a landed proprietor, her father once rich and since ruined. Her mother sold her to me, by scraping together enough for the gown I found so bewitching. By moonlight, I admired her slender body, and I suddenly knew that this was she.

We men sin through ignorance, and a determination never to learn. If love is moral sentiment, then thought ought to find expression in words. Not so. What a toil of Sisyphus was our conversation!

Scarcely had we thought of something to say, when we had to resume our silence and try to discover new subjects. Literally, we did not know what to say to each other. For that which occupied our minds was not a thing to be expressed in words.

And so, we married, and so, in time, we quarreled. And as our marriage was something unspoken, our quarrels began to define it.

[Movement I, 19-27]

What is it?

Nothing. Leave me be.

What is it?

Don't touch me.

What have I done?

Nothing. Nothing at all, except your usual selfishness and cruelty!

Cruelty? I love you! You love me, our souls are united!

Our souls. You want nothing from me but my body, this body! And when you're finished, you roll over, you snore! I, I am nothing to you, I do not exist for you!

That's not true!

And now you compound cruelty with lies!

No! Never!

And the louder I protested, the more I realized the truth. Our fights were protests of human nature against enslavement. The hatred of accomplices in crime. I say we quarreled, but that's not quite right. We engaged in ferocious acts of discovery. Discovery of our actual situation.

A young man speaks to my wife. He looks at her with a smile, he surveys her body. She seems pleased. She brushes back her hair, she lightly touches his arm. And in my soul there rises such a hatred for her...She notices it; she is content. But appearances: I pretend not to care, and I treat the man with the courtesy of my class and position.

[Movement I, 28-36]

What is the matter with you?

Nothing, I am as well as usual.

Who was that man?

The doctor.

That's not our doctor.

A new doctor. Well recommended.

And he looks at you, this doctor, he looks at you unclothed.

He examines me. I'm his patient. Yes.

And the pleasantries you just exchanged, the glances, the smiles...

Polite conversation with an acquaintance.

And nothing more?

No!

Are you certain?

Am I certain?

Are you?!

You really have gone entirely insane. You know that, right?

[Music tag]

The children came rapidly, one after another, and the children became an additional cause of dispute, and the larger they grew, the more they became further battlegrounds. We each had favorites; for me, it was dainty little Lisa, timid and kind. The children suffered for our favoritism, but we couldn't be bothered to think of them. All that mattered was our perpetual combat.

[Movement I, 354-366]

What time is it?

It is bed time.

No. Not tonight. I'm not well.

I said nothing.

I know how you think.

I meant, it's time for bed.

And all you intend is to sleep?

Yes! That's all!

And our quarrels continued, day after day, over matters increasingly banal and trivial. Money matters, child rearing decisions, additions to our house. Social occasions, which invitations to accept and which we could ignore. And these fights were not evenly waged. I held the pursestrings, while she had the

constant advantage of her female moral superiority, born of moral purity. And still, the battle raged.

How have you planned nothing for dinner today?!

Opera tickets, I loathe opera, why did you purchase these?!

More bills from the doctor? Why did he come this time? Are you trying to bankrupt me?!

I've asked you not to wear rouge, or mascara. Why do you ignore my every wish?!

And as she grew older and more beautiful, she paid more and more attention to herself, to her face, to her pleasures, and less to our children, who were anyway being raised by servants. She began to devote herself passionately to the violin, which had formerly rested forgotten in its case.

And then, THE MAN appeared.

[Movement II, through Variation 2 plays alongside the following]

He was a musician, a pianist. Educated at the Conservatory, in Paris. Troukhatchevsky.

Moist eyes of almond shape, smiling red lips, a little moustache well waxed, hair brushed in the latest fashion, a vulgarly pretty face. In his manners an external and artificial charm, a man of hints and innuendos, a man of unfinished fragments, insinuating and insincere; half formed and incomplete, like the music he played so beautifully.

At my murder trial, the verdict was rendered that I was a deceived husband, that I had killed in defence of my sullied honor, and thus I was acquitted.

I have come to understand, however, that her relations with the musician, whatever they may have been, are now of no importance. This man came into our house when the very air was poison. If it hadn't been him, it would've been someone else. If not jealousy, I would have found something else to obsess over.

We were both so desperately unhappy, my wife and I. I was several times on the point of suicide, and she made an attempt to poison herself.

And yet I was the one who made him a friend, Troukhatchevsky. I invited him to play, I arranged a concert in my home.

[End Movement II]

Couldn't I have just dismissed him coldly, was it necessary that I tell him that my wife was a fine violinist? Or leave them alone to arrange which pieces they should perform?

What does this mean? I've come to talk with you, and you keep smoking.

What do you want?

I see that you're displeased with the music I chose for Sunday's concert.

Not a concert. A fête, nothing more.

A concert. A performance.

I'm not displeased.

Do you think I'm an idiot?

Play what you want to! I don't care.

No, that's true. This is important to me, this concert! Of course you can't be bothered.

If the honor of the family is nothing to you, to me it is everything!

What! What on earth do you mean?

Go away, in the name of God!

You have become absolutely impossible.

Yes, offended, humiliated, and dishonored, and still you hold me responsible! Go away, or I will kill you!

I twist her arm, push her away violently.

What is the matter with you?!

Go away! Go away, go away!

I rushed to the table, grasped the paper-weight, and threw it at her. I aimed a little to one side of her, I think. I grabbed a candlestick, which I also threw. Again, I tried to miss, I think. I did miss, at any rate. I did not throw at her. I didn't. As I remember it.

An hour later an old servant came to me and said that my wife was in a fit of hysterics. I went to see her. She sobbed, couldn't speak, trembling. Terrified. She wanted the doctor, but I couldn't allow it. The gossip. All night long I cared for her, with a genuine tenderness, born of real remorse. The next morning, when she had recovered, I confessed to her that I was jealous of Troukhatchevsky, and she laughed in the most natural way.

Him? You cannot be serious.

Foolish, I know.

With that mouth? Those white little hands. What a joke!

FIVE more pages to the end of the play

REVIEWS:

Watch, Learn, Listen: Plan-B Theatre, NOVA Chamber Music Series join forces on Eric Samuelsen's *The Kreutzer Sonata*

by

[Les Roka](#)

For **The Utah Review**

October 13, 2015

As much as a live performance of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Beethoven's masterpiece for violin and piano, clarified the daunting project of translating Leo Tolstoy's novella by the same name into an hour-long play to open [Plan-B Theatre's](#) silver anniversary season, playwright Eric Samuelsen knew what he now needed to carry forward his creative process.

"I listened to punk rock – The Clash, Sex Pistols, Ramones," says Samuelsen, who always listens to music when he writes plays. "It helped me get pretty close to where I wanted the play to be."

He takes expansive liberties with Tolstoy's original 19th century novella, a story of nearly 32,000 words about a man, caught up in a jealousy-fueled rage, who murders his wife, after returning from a business trip and discovering her in the dining room (fully dressed, incidentally) with a strikingly handsome violinist.

What emerges in Plan-B's newest play, directed by Jerry Rapier, is an audaciously experimental, unquestionably unique treatment – a script of less than 3,500 words – that synthesizes the spirit of Tolstoy's story and the relentlessly visceral energy of Beethoven's music in a work that only a few producing directors might consider feasible enough to pull off convincingly. In a couple of other adaptations, a separate companion performance of the sonata is offered but here the music and its performance are deeply woven into the textual fabric. Samuelsen narrows the focus down to the man of Tolstoy's narrative (played by Robert Scott Smith), now imprisoned for the crime. He allows the audience to witness the man chronicle his own descent into madness – driven, haunted and ultimately imprisoned by the force of Beethoven's music. And, that's where the daunting unique wrinkle comes in this production: Not only does Beethoven's music serve as the *mise en scène* but the musicians performing live on stage – Kathryn Eberle, violin, and Jason Hardink, piano – become integral characters in the action. The uncompromising fierceness and ugliness of the murderer's mind are revealed in what surely will be an unforgettable collaboration.

In 2013, Plan-B and [NOVA Chamber Music Series](#) collaborated on an outstanding performance of Igor Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*. Moved by the results of the collaboration, Hardink approached Rapier about another project. "I said, "Hey, what could we do next?"" he recalls. "We met to see how we could integrate what each of us do so well on a more intimate basis."

Hardink's idea arose naturally. Before his twins were born and his wife (Kimi) was working in Texas on her doctorate from Rice University, he used the free time to read great works of literature, including Tolstoy's *War and Peace* as well as *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Hardink, whose music career takes him all over the country, had never before played the piano part of the famous sonata but he and Eberle were planning a performance series covering all of Beethoven's violin sonatas as part of NOVA's gallery series. "The idea of the Kreutzer seemed to be the best place for us to work together," he explains. Of course, a significant difference at the outset is that the genders of the musicians had to be switched (as Tolstoy's story cast the woman as the pianist and her friend as the violinist).

It might surprise some people outside of the professional musical world that at the time when the project possibilities were being discussed, Hardink and Eberle did not know each other all that well personally outside of the realm of rehearsals and performances. "I initially hesitated about asking her if she would be interested in doing this," Hardink recalls. "After all, it is a 19th century tale of a misogynist who really is this terrible asshole." Hardink adds that Eberle thought immediately it would be a great project and she did not hesitate on agreeing to participate.

Samuelsen always leavens his tautly written work with the appropriate overarching historical context to make the narrative credible and sensible. An important scholar of Scandinavian literature, Samuelsen thought initially of August Strindberg's novel *Inferno*, which explores a variety of psychological conditions, paranoia, neurosis and persecution complex in dramatic effect.

Without explicitly stating it, Samuelsen frames *The Kreutzer Sonata* as a critique of marriage norms and mores of the century of Romanticism and their accompanying double standards of sexuality. And, then there is Beethoven's music. "By our estimation he is a really dreadful person but I also want to help the audience hear the music the way he hears it," he explains. Early in the play, the man says, "Music is frightful. It can lead to terrible acts; it seduces men to commit them. The Chinese are right to ban it. And I have the right to insist that you listen, because of what I have done."

The prologue leads directly into the live performance of the first movement in its entirety: a roller coaster of emotion, drama, and brutally demanding technique. Hardink says the music for the violinist can be physically discomforting at times. The man says, "Watch, learn. Listen. I have come to understand, however, that her relations with the musician, whatever they may have been, are now of no importance. This man came into our house when the very air was poison. If it hadn't been him, it would've been someone else. If not jealousy, I would have found something else to obsess over."

Samuelsen's script follows the music's architecture in exquisite parallels. Moments of ecstasy are interposed with those of rumbling turbulence, an element Beethoven manifested magnificently in much of his music. The music of the 19th Century Romantics could generate beguiling and tempestuous sensations of heroism juxtaposed with defiant misanthropism. An interesting side note is that Rodolphe Kreutzer, the French violinist, was not the original beneficiary of the sonata's dedication. Beethoven had dedicated the sonata to George Bridgetower, who publicly performed the work the first time without any rehearsal at a morning concert—an unbelievable feat but not all that uncommon in the days of the early 19th century. Beethoven removed the dedication after Bridgetower had disparaged the character of a woman whom Beethoven greatly admired.

Review: Plan-B and NOVA team up on a powerful production of 'The Kreutzer Sonata'

Review • "The Kreutzer Sonata" integrates music with a chilling tale of murder.

by Catherine Reese Newton The Salt Lake Tribune

Forget about music's supposed charms to soothe the savage breast. In Eric Samuelsen's new one-act play, "The Kreutzer Sonata," music has power to drive a man to murder.

Plan-B Theatre Company and the NOVA Chamber Music Series opened their seasons together Sunday night with a gripping performance of Samuelsen's play, based on Leo Tolstoy's novella of the same name. Over the course of an hour, the protagonist explains how hearing his wife play Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 9 (nicknamed the "Kreutzer" Sonata) with a male acquaintance drove him to murder her.

Samuelsen's taut script, which boils Tolstoy's novella to its essentials, seamlessly integrates the art forms of music and theater. Violinist Kathryn Eberle and pianist Jason Hardink never interact with actor Robert Scott Smith or even acknowledge his presence — for that matter, they make no more eye contact with each other than is absolutely necessary — yet their performance carries breathtaking dramatic force. Likewise, there is terrifying music in Smith's spoken monologue, a bitter indictment of music and marriage that crescendoes until it becomes operatic in its fury.

"Listen as I listen," the murderer challenges his audience. As we do, we begin to hear defiance in Eberle's playing, though her face remains impassive.

Jerry Rapier's direction, Randy Rasmussen's minimalist set and Jesse Portillo's lighting design match the excellence of the three performers.

THE KREUTZER SONATA

Les Roka for Salt Lake Magazine

As outstanding as *The Season of Eric* was, Samuelsen gave Plan-B some of its most incredible blockbuster moments in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (2015) and *The Ice Front* (2017).

Borderlands shined when Plan-B celebrated its 20th anniversary. Opening the company's silver anniversary season, *The Kreutzer Sonata* was a creative declaration of excellence. Directed by Rapier, it was one of the most thrilling pieces of chamber theater that could be presented in less than 50 minutes. Samuelsen's play transformed Leo Tolstoy's novella of the same name – a story about a man going mad who tries to rationalize murdering his wife, believing that she was having an affair with her musician friend. In collaboration with the [NOVA Chamber Music Series](#), the play featured live excerpts from the Beethoven work of the same name, with pianist Jason Hardink and violinist Kathryn Eberle, the Utah Symphony's associate concertmaster, performing.

Samuelsen captured the driving pace of Beethoven's work in a theatrical setting that was stupendous at every turn. He let Pozdnyshv (performed brilliantly by actor Robert Scott Smith) explain the most candid depths of his madness while drawing the audience inward to “watch, learn and listen” in the way this tormented man might have heard the music. Only the first movement was played in its entirety and, in more than 15 other instances, Samuelsen weaved the music — sometimes no more than a bar or two of music or an extended yet brief segment of one of the sonata's other two movements — progressively deeper into the monologue, often with Pozdnyshv speaking over the musicians' phrases. As [The Utah Review](#) highlighted, this was music as classic *mise en scène* — the play's de facto fourth character.

Samuelsen trimmed Tolstoy's 32,000-word novella to just 3,500 words in the script: 70 percent were his own and the remaining portion came from the Russian novelist. He initially listened to a live performance of the entire work by Eberle and Hardink. As he pursued the project, he said, in classic Samuelsenesque style, “I listened to punk rock – The Clash, Sex Pistols, Ramones. It helped me get pretty close to where I wanted the play to be.” Eberle said the experience was so tremendous that future performances of the sonata would be approached with the play in mind.