

**BOOK REVIEW**  
**Complex genius**

By NORMAN DEPOE  
Take a complex genius of our Canadian time; take a complex and triple-barrelled subject like music as performance, as sensation, and as concept; take a complex auctorial mind that could belong only to a musicologist who has read widely and deeply in aesthetic philosophy — and you're going to get a complex book.

Which is what we have in Glenn Gould, Music And Mind, by Geoffrey Payzant (Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 192 pages, \$14.95). The book operates on several levels. The highest of them is skull-cracking, demanding not only a knowledge of the classical pianistic and orchestral repertoires — not to mention music for the organ or harpsichord — but also some idea of how the great composers and performers approached and viewed their roles in life, as revealed by their writings and off-hand statements to interviewers.

At the lowest level, Payzant recounts Gould's well-known eccentricities — perhaps idiosyncracies would be a better word — such as the sight that became familiar around Canadian Broadcasting Corp. recording studios in the early 1950's. He would walk in on a warm summer day — swathed to the ears in a woolen overcoat, a muffler around his neck, a tweed cap on his head, his hands covered in fingerless knitted woolen gloves — test the tuning on the piano, summon a tuner to fix a few notes, and then soak his hands and forearms in warm water for 20 minutes before a performance.

WHO'S CRAZY?  
He always played from a low chair, with the piano up on blocks; he crouched on the keyboard, and the chair had each leg individually adjusted so that he could lean sideways, backwards or forward as he felt the music demanding him to. He crooned to the keyboard if he had a right-hand figure to play alone, he would conduct it with his free left hand.

On the concert platform, these mannerisms struck some critics as signs of essential madness, and they said so in scornful terms.

Payzant asks: How can a man be crazy, when he is doing exactly what he not only wants to do, but feels he must do?

He quotes some of Gould's own writings on music. The biographer is cautious enough to warn the reader that Gould often indulges himself in obscure, prolix, and over-extended jokes, especially with the kind of "musicologist" interviewer who adheres to the old concert-hall tradition of the virtuoso performer — Franz Liszt, for example, or some of the flashier failures of our own time.

Gould despises mere virtuosity, as he despises the skills of a bull-fighter or a gymnast. His music is as much in the mind and in the soul as in what he produces from a keyboard.

HEARING A VOICE  
For example, when he conducts himself playing right-hand alone, and hums at the same time, Payzant suggests that Gould is hearing a "third voice" one not available to a mere two hands, and one possibly audible to Gould alone.

Furthermore, Gould is a heretic. He early embraced technology — the idea that in a concert hall, it was wrong for the merely adequate pianist or violinist or other soloist to get full marks for playing a piece right through from beginning to end without committing too many egregious technical errors.

When he abandoned the concert hall, at the peak of his fame, he did so because he wanted the chance of recording sections of works again and again until they were right, and then splicing the "right" sections together.

Modern recording techniques eliminate all splicing clicks, and can match tonalities to produce something close to Gould's idea of what the music is trying to say.

IDEA OF MUSIC  
On top of this, there is a formidable philosophy, evolved by Gould himself, with assists from such philosophers as Jean LeMoigne — a philosopher that may create a new music with all the help of technology.

Nowadays, Gould — a practising and vehement hypochondriac — rarely goes to concert halls. He doesn't like the bravura, show-off dynamics necessary in the concert hall, to fill a big auditorium. And he's afraid of catching a cold.

He works away steadily, though, at the idea of music, and the possibility that recordings can find it more closely than any other technique.

His Columbia albums (though a few have met with critical disdain) are mostly proof that his quest is valid.

This is not everyone's book. But if you love music and have a smattering of philosophy, meet Glenn Gould as presented by Geoffrey Payzant.

Norman DePoe, a former CBC staffer, has worked with Glenn Gould in radio.  
— Thomson News Service.

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