

# Glenn Gould is an enigmatic musical figure

By ALEX BARRIS

No more brilliant, fascinating or enigmatic Canadian musical figure than Glenn Gould has appeared on the horizon this century. His genius as a pianist is unchallenged. His eccentricities, both on the concert stage and off, helped make him even more of a "celebrity" than his music alone could have done. His sudden death in 1982, at the age of 50, shocked much of the world.

His short life had been so full of contradictions, his actions so well (if not accurately) publicized, his decision to give up playing in public at the age of 32 so mystifying, that all sorts of legends about him surfaced, were widely circulated and inevitably distorted.

Attempting to write a biography about such a complex figure is a brave and massive undertaking. Glenn Gould, A Life and Variations, by Otto Friedrich (Lester and Orpen Dennys Ltd., 400 pages, illustrated, \$27.95), is a heroic attempt to put Gould's life and achievements into some sort of perspective.

Friedrich, a senior editor for Time Magazine and author of City of Nets (an excellent portrait of Hollywood in the 1940s), was selected by the Glenn Gould estate to write his "authorized" biography, but Friedrich makes it clear that he had a free hand and a minimum of interference from sensitive survivors who might have preferred to touch up some of the less complimentary aspects of Gould's life.

Friedrich's book is neither a whitewash nor an "expose," but a careful, sober and honest attempt to sum up a man who, by his very nature, almost defies definition.

Although he had been a child prodigy and was recognized as a superior artist in Canada by the time he was in his early 20s, Gould's international reputation really was launched in the mid-1950s when Columbia Records

released internationally Gould's recording of Bach's Goldberg Variations. Critics everywhere raved over the pianist's skill and imagination, and his intensity. Paul Hume, of the Washington Post, wrote: "We know of no pianist like him at any age."

### STRANGE

But while audiences and critics hailed Gould's playing, they were equally willing to denounce his concert stage manner. Gould simply would not behave like a "proper" concert artist. He slouched, he bent over the keyboard, he wrapped one leg around the other, he flailed his arms around in seemingly spastic imotional responses to the very music he was involved in. The stories grew and spread - he wore gloves with the fingers cut out of them when he played, he was forever cold, he wore mufflers and overcoats in the warmest weather, he was a hypochondriac, he was... well... strange.

Columbia Records was not the least bit reticent about exploiting the bizarre personality of its new recording star. Gould may have been strange, but the more people talked about him, the better known he became, and the more records and concert tickets he sold.

Even his battles were grist for the publicity mills. One of these was his disagreement with Leonard Bernstein in 1962 about how to play a Brahms concerto, which became so serious an issue that Bernstein felt compelled to warn the audience in advance of the "unorthodox performance" it was about to witness, which surely offended Gould.

But Gould himself seemed undisturbed by his ever-increasing reputation for eccentricity. "My policy," he told an interviewer for The New Yorker, "has long been to cut the cloth to fit the corner newsstand."

In 1959, Gould appeared at a press conference in London unshaven, wearing a knee-length

jacket, heavy overcoat and two pairs of gloves. "What makes you think I'm eccentric?" he asked the assembled reporters.

And then, rather suddenly, he decided in 1964 that he would do no more public concerts. In fact, there had been ample advance warning of this. As early as 1956, he said: "I am not very fond of the concert business. I am not endeared to the footlights at all. And it is a devastating road if you can't endure travelling." And even before that, he was on record as saying: "I'm more convinced than ever that I'd rather be a composer. I don't particularly care to play before the public. I love playing for myself."

### PRE-DETERMINED

Gould's "public" career, however, was not over - only the concert stage aspect of it. For the remaining 18 years of his life, he devoted himself to studios - recording studios, radio studios, even film and television studios. He became absorbed with the technology of tape recording, with the possibilities that lay there to splice bits and pieces of different performances into one superior one. He taped (and broadcast) "impromptu" interviews, in which every word of every question and answer was pre-determined, scripted.

He was, as far as the public was concerned, a recluse. He had a network of friends, with whom he would converse endlessly by phone, often in the middle of the night, but he shunned public appearances of any kind.

### MY GENERATION

"Fashions For The Young At Heart"

115 MAIN ST. S., GEORGETOWN  
Across from Knox Church 873-2851

Gould was plagued by an assortment of ailments. As Friedrich points out, "Just as paranoids do have real enemies... hypochondriacs do have real illnesses." Gould had high blood pressure, circulation trouble, tingling nerves in his arms and legs, an inner-ear problem, shortness of breath, a chronic sore throat, and so on.

In trying to untangle the various mysteries of Gould's life, biographer Friedrich even explores what scant evidence there is about his private life (even his sexual life), but comes up more or less empty.

In 1978, Geoffrey Payzant wrote a book called Glenn Gould, Music and Mind. In it, he predicted that

the author of a "conventional biography" of Gould would fail. "A book on his life and time would be brief and boring," he added.

(Typically, Gould himself reviewed Payzant's book and dismissed it as "rather boring and by no means as brief as it should be.")

But Friedrich's biography of Gould is neither brief nor boring. If it inevitably leaves some questions unanswered, it still makes an honest and readable attempt to review and assess the life and work of this remarkable musician.

—Alex Barris, a Toronto-area writer, is the author of several books on film and television.

## Great Leap

China's Great Leap Forward, 1958-60, tried to force the pace of economic development through intensive labor on huge new rural communes and through emphasis on ideological purity and enthusiasm. The program caused resistance and was largely abandoned. Serious food shortages developed, and the government was forced to buy grain from the West.

## Sky Tech

According to The World Almanac, one of the more "interesting" inventions issued patents during 1988 was: "Process and Apparatus for Preventing Bird Collisions," a method of preventing bird collisions with aircraft during takeoff, landing and flight by using a rapidly operating flashlight to scare away the birds.



**R.E. McCall**  
Men's Wear

STORE HOURS:  
9:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m.  
except  
Thursday & Friday  
9:30 a.m.-9:00 p.m.  
City Styles...  
Close To Home!

211 Guelph Street  
Georgetown 877-7361  
NORTHVIEW CENTRE

**LAST WEEK**

**9.9%**  
FINANCING  
OVER  
JUNE 17th!

*Frost*

PONTIAC BUICK CADILLAC  
320 QUEEN ST. E.  
BRAMPTON  
**459-0126**



## GREEN MEADOWS NURSERY AND GARDEN CENTER

R.R. 3 — 6th LINE, GEORGETOWN



C.I.L. GOLFGREEN LAWN FOOD	
9 kg - Reg. \$9.54	Sale \$8.59
14 kg - Reg. \$12.56	Sale \$11.30
13 kg. - Reg. \$16.09	Sale \$14.50

## BRINGS YOU FATHER'S DAY SAVINGS!

C.I.L. Golfgreen Weed & Feed	
9 kg - Reg. \$13.05	Sale \$11.75
14 kg - Reg. \$16.76	Sale \$15.08
15 kg - Reg. \$20.36	Sale \$18.33

**BEDDING PLANTS**

**79¢**

**HANGING BASKETS**

**\$9.80**

**POTTED ROSES**

**\$5.99**

**LANDSCAPING FABRIC \$9<sup>50</sup>**

**LOG EDGING \$5<sup>75</sup>**

**JOBES FERTILIZER SPIKES**

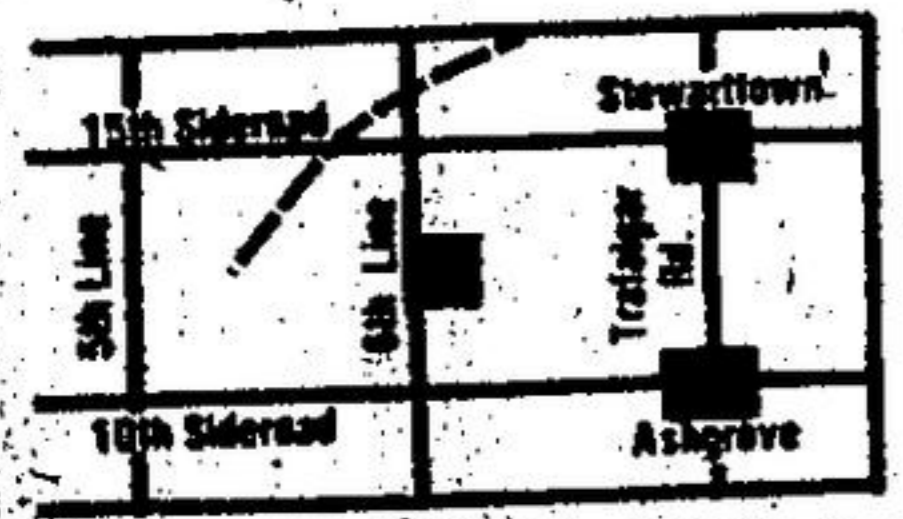
**\$9.99**

Reg. \$10.99 SALE

**CERAMIC VASES**

Assorted Colours & Sizes

**15% OFF** Reg. Price



— FEATURE OF THE WEEK —

**TOOLS FOR DAD**

**10% OFF**

**HOURS:**

Monday - Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

— OPEN SUNDAYS —  
10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

**873-1200**