



THE GLENN GOULD MONTHLY

January 2009

From the archives:

From Russia with love...

By Sofia Moshevich
The Glenn Gould Magazine, Fall 1997

Glenn Gould's love affair with the Russians began on 7 May, 1957. The Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory was half empty by evening: Gould's name was unfamiliar to the Russian audience, and few had come to the recital. But news travelled fast in Moscow musical circles, and the next day tickets for his coming recitals were instantly sold out. His playing had caused such a sensation that his name became literally famous overnight. Russian music lovers have been fascinated by his art and have adored and worshipped him ever since.

The Russians were grateful for Gould "discoveries", namely his performances of music by Krenek, Hindemith, Schoenberg and Webern. After his recitals, modern composers gradually became better appreciated, and began to appear more often on concert programmes.

Why was Gould the pianist so readily accepted by Russian audiences? His genius was not the only reason. Another important factor was the Russian tradition of performance, which allowed the performer great freedom in the interpretation of a score. It was a common belief that

" a composer's text is like a dotted line. The lines between the dots are drawn by the performer, and they are not necessarily straight lines."

Recall Rachmaninov's interpretation of Chopin's B-flat-minor sonata, in which (like Anton Rubinstein before him) he played the recapitulation of the Funeral March at a powerful fortissimo instead of the piano indicated by the composer, and you can understand what is meant by this quotation. Gould's interpretative experiments in fact could sound relatively modest compared to what Russian audiences were used to hearing from performers like Mariya Yudina.

Gould and the Russians were on common aesthetic ground in terms of piano performance, but Gould as a philosopher and writer was unknown to Russians for a very long time. Periodicals, journals and books in foreign languages were not available in the U.S.S.R.; one could not buy them, or bring them into the country. There were some foreign books and journals in the Central Lenin Library in Moscow, but one had to stand in line for many hours to get permission to look at a certain item.

It was (also) very difficult in the Soviet Union to get Gould's records from the West, and few were fortunate to obtain them. Most of us had to buy the record available in Russian stores, and we were happy to find any by Gould. In 1968, the Russian label Melodiya released Gould's performance of Bach's Sinfonia in broadcast from his 7 May 1957 recital in Moscow. Although the Columbia recording of the same piece was released four years earlier, in 1964, the Soviet recording was the only one available in Russia, and the only one that Russians knew.

More than forty years have passed since Gould's visit to the Soviet Union, and a new generation - several new generations - of Russian musicians have been introduced to the world of music. In February of 1996, the Russian pianist Grigory Sokolov gave a recital in Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto. The first half of the programme was devoted to music by Bach: eight preludes and fugues from The Well-Tempered Clavier. It was a wonderful performance, typically Russian in its warm lyricism, intimate, yet bold in its imaginative articulation and exquisite tone production. It was different, and did not remind anyone of Gould's interpretations. But a thought crossed my mind: it was not a coincidence that Sokolov began his recital with Gould's music; it was a homage to Gould in his own native city. And Gould's presence was definitely felt in Sokolov's performance - in its freedom and unrestricted creativity.

It seems to me that Gould's love affair with the Russians continues.



A special note about the Glenn Gould magazine:

To all our valued readers:

For more than a decade, from 1995 to 2008, The Glenn Gould Foundation has been publishing GlennGould magazine, most recently through the auspices of University of Toronto Press.

We are very proud of this accomplishment, but with time, changing communication technologies and rising costs, we have revisited the current incarnation of the magazine.

Accordingly I must inform you that this issue, fall 2008, will be the last GlennGould magazine. We sincerely thank our wonderful editor and principal contributor, Kevin Bazzana, and the many other contributors and who have worked to make the magazine so special over the years. Without them this essential contribution to the body of Gould scholarship would not have been possible.

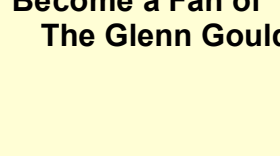
We also thank our good friends at the Journals Division of University of Toronto Press.

As part of our ongoing commitment to disseminate valuable, timely and significant information about Glenn Gould and his legacy, the Glenn Gould Foundation is in the process of expanding the content and design of its website. Much new and in-depth content will be available there in the days and months to come. In addition, you can now sign up for to receive the monthly Glenn Gould e-Newsletter (see details below). For details and to sign up, go to www.glennGould.ca

We are also happy to report that back issues of GlennGould magazine are still available for purchase, also through the Foundation's website.

At this time, we thank you for your support for the Foundation. As we move forward with exciting and ambitious plans for the Foundation's future, we will be counting on your engagement, feedback, ideas and financial contributions as never before.

Sincerely yours,
Brian M. Levine
Managing Director
The Glenn Gould Foundation



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Don't forget to keep checking

The Contrapuntal Blog

In conversation:



Tim Page on Glenn Gould: An Interview by Brian Levine Part III

Edited and transcribed by Dr. Penny Johnson

The following transcript is taken from an interview with Tim Page, author of "The Glenn Gould Reader," and conducted by Brian Levine, Managing Director of The Glenn Gould Foundation. Consisting of five installments, the interview serves as a follow-up conversation to a presentation that Page gave on 18 April

2008, as the keynote speaker for Cinematheque Ontario's Glenn Gould film series.

Installment No. 3...

BL: Well another thing that strikes me from last night, is that one of the people in the audience made the observation that she felt that Glenn was, at heart, very romantic. You can define romanticism in many ways, particularly as depth of feeling. I don't think anyone would argue with that. And yet, I think in at least one or two interviews, he confessed to be an admirer of Mahler's.

TP: Some of Mahler. He loved Strauss.

BL: And Bruckner, I think.

TP: Yes, sort of.

BL: A man who never met a modulation he could resist. For Glenn however, the first flourish of Romanticism was the beginning of a fifty-year wasteland.

TP: He called it his own blind spot. He said it was a seventy-five year blind spot, or something like that. He said that the reason was that these composers treated the piano as a homophonic instrument, and he said that he thought it was a contrapuntal instrument. Of course it's both.

BL: Yes. But he loved the sound of the instrument for its own sake.

TP: Yes.

BL: And furious about Liszt and Chopin?

TP: Yeah, he really didn't like Liszt, and he didn't like Chopin. He liked some Mendelssohn, and some Brahms.

BL: No Schumann?

TP: No, almost no Schumann, and I'm not really sure that he really even liked what he said he liked. It just wasn't his thing so much. It's funny, you know, the answer to the question, "Was Glenn a Romantic or was he not?" – which did get talked about last night – is – as was almost always the case with Glenn – "Well, kind of."

He's a very paradoxical figure, in that almost anything you can say about him can be refuted by something else. And maybe all of us have some of this to us, but Glenn was a hard core Romantic in many ways, and yet he despised a lot of Romantic effusion. One thing that doesn't need to be qualified is that he certainly was a quirky guy. [laughs]

BL: For sure, and I think that in many ways, that quirkiness tends to get over-played. One thing I know from those who worked with Glenn, is that they talk of his enormous kindness, certainly in the way he disposed of his worldly goods. You sense – and it comes from the anecdotes of his childhood – an enormous aversion to being helpless, a creature suffering, –

TP: A very fine man.

BL: Yes. I don't know if you know the story about the Czech pianist, Antonin Kubalek, who I had a chance to work with. He came over from Czechoslovakia.

TP: Didn't Glenn produce one record?

BL: He produced one record, absolutely. Anyway, we had a chance to talk. He ended up in Canada almost by happen-stance. Anton is visually impaired. He has about ten percent sight in one eye, and the other one is a false eye as a result of an injury he suffered at the end of the Second World War. He found his way to Vienna and found his way to the Canadian Embassy where he was told he could get out of Europe, and he went. It took him about six months to get introduced to the members of the Czech-Canadian community, and about another three weeks to get introduced to people at the CBC. They brought him in to do a broadcast recital. He came in and they led him, and then he sat down and played the piano and everything was fun, wonderful, and then he went away. Then about five years later, a letter arrived in the mail and it was from Glenn Gould. It said:

"Dear Mr. Kubalek, I don't know whether you have heard of me, but I am a local pianist of sorts and one of my haunts is the CBC building on Parliament Street. I happened to be wandering through when I passed the theatre where you were working this last week, and I was struck by how beautiful your playing was and how fascinating your approach to the music was so I went in and asked the producer about you and he told me a little bit of your story. I know it's hard to start a new life in a new country. I hope this helps."

Inside there was a cheque for \$1,500.

TP: Ah, that's very Glenn.

BL: Apparently there are many unheralded instances of such kindness, and although by all reports he was good with money, I think that basically he didn't care a great deal about it any more than as a means of supporting himself, and allowing himself to create.

TP: I think that's true, although he took an enormous, and actually a fairly profitable interest in the stock market. I mean, almost as some kind of cosmic financial bingo game. But he did quite well with it. He did, from what I understand, extremely well with the stock market. I mean, not the way extremely well means nowadays where fortunes are made, but back in the old days before everything went completely crazy, he made several hundred thousand dollars in the stock market.

BL: Absolutely. Apparently he managed to be ahead of the game in fair markets, and his broker was inordinately impressed with that.

TP: He was a smart guy.

BL: On the other hand, if you look at another musician of a slightly earlier generation, Herbert von Karajan – who amassed an enormous fortune – we have here a media empire. Clearly that was not the kind of thing that interested Glenn for his own sake.

TP: No, it wasn't the power aspect. That didn't do it. Of course Glenn couldn't do what Karajan did because a large part of the reason Karajan made so much money was that Karajan performed live in all those places, and got the highest fees. I heard somewhere that Glenn was offered one million dollars for a concert, which sounds apocryphal, but it wouldn't surprise me if he were offered – remember we're going back a ways – something like \$100,000 or \$250,000 or something like that. I mean, enormous amounts of money by the standards of that time if he would come out and do a concert and he said no.

BL: Yes. The only historic return that I think he would serious contemplate was the one on the oilrig.

TP: That's one of his most humorous records. It's actually quite a terrific record.

BL: Absolutely. Lorne Tulk who was in attendance last night, told me an interesting story – which, I think must have at least some substance because Lorne was there – which is that Herbert von Karajan was so pleased with his concert collaboration with Glenn, that he spent much of the rest of his life wanting to work with Glenn again and even at one point towards the end of his life, he considered leaving Deutsche Grammophon for Sony so that they could record together.

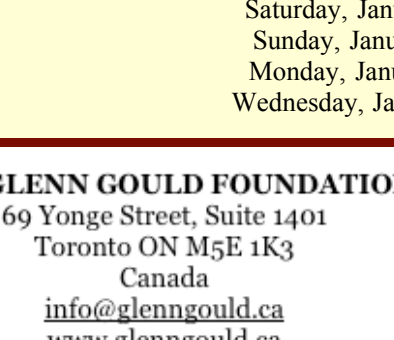
TP: I don't think he would have left Deutsche Grammophon. I think he would have arranged – and I bet Deutsche Grammophon would have permitted it – for a single out. You know the McGreevy book has a quote from Karajan at the start.

BL: Yes, a very beautiful one.

TP: Yes. Karajan admired Gould enormously. Whatever else may be said about Karajan, he had ears, and he recognized a great musician when he heard it.

Installment IV continues in February

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT:



Vancouver screening of Thirty Two Short Films about Glenn Gould
a Francoise Girard production - exclusive limited engagement

Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould is a compelling and striking exploration of the idiosyncratic world of Gould's ideas and music, from his thoughts on technology and northern climates to his fondness for prescription drugs. Sumptuously photographed and designed as 32 separate visual and sound fragments, it uses drama, documentary, animation and performance art to provide insight into the life and work of the enigmatic Canadian genius. Colm Feore's performance as Gould is genuinely astounding and intimate, immersing viewers in the musician's universe.

Written by Don McKellar and Francoise Girard with a rare combination of playfulness and conceptual rigour, the film remains one of the most successful Canadian films of all time and boasts an enormous cult following. The cast includes McKellar, Gerry Quigley, David Hughes, Bruno Monsiegeon, Yehudi Menuhin, Peter Millard, Carlo Rota, Katya Ladan and Gale Garnett.

Pacific Cinematheque
1131 Howe Street
Vancouver, BC
604-688-3456
www.cinematheque.bc.ca

Screening times:

- Thursday, January 8 at 7:30 p.m.
- Friday, January 9 at 9:15 p.m.
- Saturday, January 10 at 7:30 p.m.
- Sunday, January 11 at 9:15 p.m.
- Monday, January 12 at 7:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, January 14 at 9:15 p.m.

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