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Henri Temianka Correspondence; (lte)

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Description

This collection contains material pertaining to the life, career, and activities of Henri Temianka, violin virtuoso, conductor, music teacher, and author. Materials include correspondence, concert programs and flyers, music scores, photographs, and books.

Keywords

Henri Temianka; culture; virtuosity in musical performance; violinist; chamber music; camaraderie; press; May 22, 1989;

Singing Mahler to the Elephants

A new biography explores the eccentric genius of Glenn Gould

BY PICO IYER

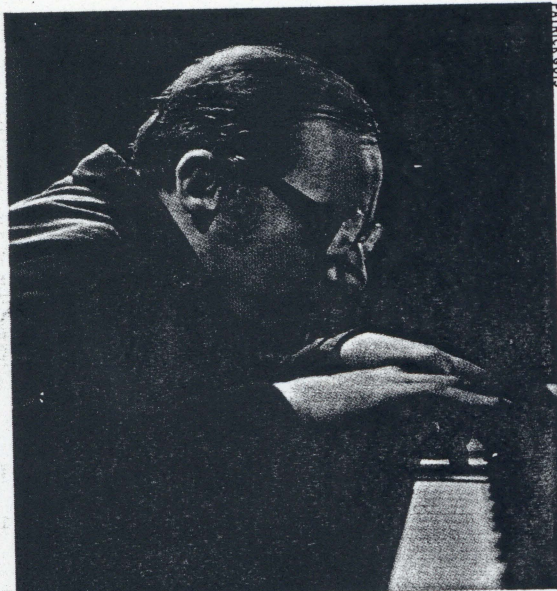
Among the few modern concert performers whom even the tone-deaf have heard of, none is more intriguing than the Canadian pianist Glenn Gould—not only because of his electrifying reinventions of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, among other pieces, but also because of the strikingly eccentric artistic creation that was his life. Who could for-

get the singular genius who hummed about on summer days swathed in mufflers and overcoats (because of his hypochondria), and in concerts sat himself down on a pygmy chair and proceeded to sigh, groan, sing and wave his hands about as he played? Who could resist the story of the monkish prodigy who burst onto the scene at 23 only to abandon concerts for good eight years later? When Gould died at 50 in 1982, he left behind a mess of unanswered letters and a plethora of unanswered questions. Now, for the first time, the whole jumble has been largely straightened out in an admirably lucid and level-headed biography by Otto Friedrich, author of such previous books as *Before the Deluge* and *City of Nets* and a TIME senior writer. In *Glenn Gould: A Life and Variations* (Random House, \$24.95), Friedrich counterpoints Gould's prolific writings with the reminiscences of more than 80 people who knew him, from Leonard Bernstein to his cousin in Jessie Greig. The result is a guided tour through the mind of a haunted original who dreamed of "a world where nobody cared what anybody else was doing."

There is, of course, plenty of strangeness here: Gould rehearsing a children's choir while crouched in a pew, nothing visible but his hand; Gould serenading the elephants at the Toronto zoo by singing them Mahler at dawn. Yet at play within him was something deeper than mere oddity. Able to read music before he could read words, Gould found he could learn scores most easily while listening simultaneously to TV shows or the roar of a vacuum cleaner. Always, his remarkable gifts were shadowed by a perversity that drove him to torture the works he disliked (notably, most of Mozart), and by a habit of compulsive experimentation that made him treat even human voices as little

more than sounds. Inspiringly, Gould saw music as his world; chillingly, he also read the world as nothing more than music.

His deepest relationships, then, were always with himself, and with the luminous sounds he entertained in his head. In his determination to control everything around him, he scripted, down to the last pause, his "off-the-cuff" public interviews and devoted himself to a technology that would allow him, he thought, to create

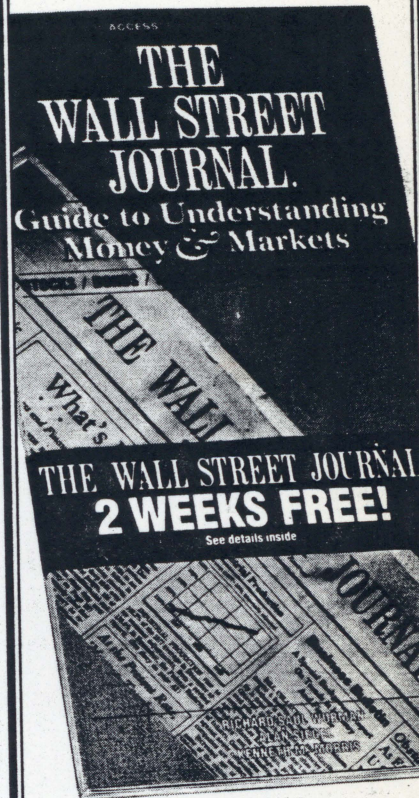


Gould in 1981: locked in the echo chamber of his mind
Some listeners felt his playing changed their lives.

perfect pieces of music simply by splicing together flawless passages. His ambition, he once said, was "to try my hand at being a prisoner." He achieved that goal, perhaps, by locking himself more and more inside the echo chamber of his own mind, becoming, in the process, a man possessed, and not only by genius.

Gould's performances, writes Friedrich, had "a strange power unlike anything in the work of any other pianist . . . a power that made many people feel that their lives had somehow been changed, deepened, enriched." Still, Friedrich respects Gould's talents too much to canonize, or psychoanalyze, him. Instead, he sends the reader back to the recordings. And there, as one listens, one senses that in some deep but precise sense, Gould and his piano were truly one. For the man himself was a highly sensitive instrument, tuned to a fine pitch, capable of many moods, and played upon at times by otherworldly forces that found in him an unforgettable beauty. ■

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