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| Gould, Glenn (1932-1982) |
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| Glenn Gould was a twentieth century pianist born in Toronto in 1932. Among his major influences were the recordings of Artur Schnabel (1882-1951), who specialized in Beethoven’s sonatas, and Gould’s Toronto Conservatory teacher Alberto Guerrero (1886-1959). From Schnabel, Gould learned idiosyncratic rubato (rhythmic flexibility, to the point of taking liberties with scored tempi) and from Guerrero he learned an uncanny percussive control of his fingers at the piano keyboard. Gould’s playing had a subtle and impressive dynamic range. His playing became famous for its quirky willfulness, but as central to his style is a delicate technique that at times seemed to strike piano keys with little subjective colouration. |
| File: Gould\_1960\_CBC.jpeg  Glenn Gould was a twentieth century pianist born in Toronto in 1932. Among his major influences were the recordings of Artur Schnabel (1882-1951), who specialized in Beethoven’s sonatas, and Gould’s Toronto Conservatory teacher Alberto Guerrero (1886-1959). From Schnabel, Gould learned idiosyncratic rubato (rhythmic flexibility, to the point of taking liberties with scored tempi) and from Guerrero he learned an uncanny percussive control of his fingers at the piano keyboard. Gould’s playing had a subtle and impressive dynamic range. His playing became famous for its quirky willfulness, but as central to his style is a delicate technique that at times seemed to strike piano keys with little subjective colouration.  File: Gould\_Tulk\_1968.jpg  Gould first became famous when, in 1955, he recorded Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* (1741) for Columbia Records. Gould’s playing often lent a luminous, even romantic, quality to Bach. His recordings of Bach also displayed a level, two-handed mastery of counterpoint, but he often played Bach’s music (which was originally written for the harpsichord, an instrument with much less dynamic range than the modern piano) with a sense of drama and unfolding insight more commonly associated with Beethoven’s or Brahms’ piano music. Some critics judged that Gould meddled too much with the stately geometries of Bach’s music, but many listeners found Gould’s playing revelatory, and his recordings of Bach secured his reputation. Gould’s last major recording in 1981 reinterpreted the *Goldberg Variations*, in a digitally recorded performance that is often slower and more meditative than his 1955 version.  File: Gould\_CBC\_1969.jpg  Gould’s celebrity is based not only on his pianistic skill but also on his being a mysterious study in contrasts. His fame was based on interpretations of the work of a baroque composer (Bach), but he freely defined himself as a romantic, and some of his standout recordings are either of plainly romantic (Brahms) or of late romantic/modernist composers (Berg, Schönberg). (Gould made a point, however, of avoiding other romantic composers such as Chopin and Liszt.) Although his playing could be defined by its sensuous tactility, Gould often said rather transcendentalist things about the goals of music, such as ‘the true amalgam of ecstasy and reason’ is ‘repose,’ in liner notes for his recording of a Paul Hindemith sonata.  File: Gould\_CBC\_organ.jpg  Gould combined his selective respect for musical traditions with an unusual (for a classical musician of his moment) affinity for technology, saying that he began a lifelong love of ‘the microphone’ as an adolescent when recording with the Canadian Broadcasting Company. He often found the public performance of music to be an ordeal, and he avoided crowds on most occasions, but he had a mischievous relish of other kinds of performance and, as an actor, developed several comic alter egos for radio and television productions. In contrast to his reclusive reputation, he was often a willing interviewee and was eager to put his own views into print. In his interviews, essays, and liner notes, he combined a magisterial, fluent knowledge of many periods of music with a philosopher's musing elegance and an ironist’s refusal to take himself too seriously. He famously wore gloves and overcoats, regardless of the weather, and used a shabby, sawed-off dining room chair as his piano stool. To the amusement of his fans and to the consternation of some critics, Gould often hummed as he played, especially in his Bach recordings.  File: Gould\_CBC\_as\_Theodore\_Slotz.jpg  Many biographical sketches promote an image of Gould as hermetic, even to the point of being asexual, but more recent biographies reveal that (among other relations with women) Gould had a relationship with, and was nearly married to, Cornelia Foss, who lived with him (along with her two children from composer Lukas Foss) near Toronto from 1968-1972. Gould was a notorious hypochondriac who, especially in his last years, used cocktails of prescription medicines to treat conditions that were likely variants of anxiety symptoms.  File: Gould-soaking-hands\_Life\_1956.jpg  Gould stopped performing public concerts in 1964. He considered that recordings gave him more control as an artist and a better ability to reach listeners. In his promotion of technology, he made statements prophetic of digital playlists and the abundant audio and video archives of his career now available, much of it online. In the late 1960s, he predicted that ‘the end result of all our labours in the recording studio is not going to be some kind of autocratic finished product […] but […] a rather more democratic assemblage’ resulting from each listener becoming an ‘editor’ or ‘performer.’ Gould died of a stroke, with little forewarning, in 1982. Selected Recordings: J. S. Bach: Goldberg Variations (1955/1956)  J. S. Bach: Inventions and Sinfonias (1964/1964)  J. S. Bach: The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1, in three volumes (1962-65/1963, 1964, 1965)  Berg: Sonata No. 1; Schönberg: Three Piano Pieces, Op. 11; Krenek: Sonata No. 3, Op. 92, No. 4 (1958/1959)  Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109; No. 31 in A-Flat Major, Op. 110; No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111 (1956/1956)  Beethoven: Piano Sonatas, Opp. 13 ‘Pathétique’ and 14, Nos. 1 and 2 (1966/1967)  Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58; with Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic (1961/1961)  Brahms: Ten Intermezzi (1959-60/1961)  Brahms: Ballades, Op. 10; Rhapsodies, Op. 79 (1982/1983) |
| Further reading:  (Bazzana)  (Canadian Encyclopedia, The)  (Friedrich)  (Glenn Gould on Television: The Complete CBC Broadcasts (1954-1977))  (Glenn Gould: The Canadian Broadcasting Company Legacy)  (Gould)  (Gould at Sony Music)  (McKellar)  (Raymont) |