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ses spannenden Buches vorzulegen, die sicherlich viele neugierige Leser finden wird.

Klaus-Ernst Behne

Otto Friedrich: *Glenn Gould, A Life and Variations* Random House, New York, 1989, ISBN 0-394-56299-2, \$ 24,95, 441 pages

Glenn Gould (1932 - 1982) was perhaps the greatest truly classical Bach player of this century, whether or not he wore multiple gloves and overcoats, played the piano sitting on a drastically shortened chair - his wrists below the level of the keyboard - and exhibited other eccentricities (and with all due respect to harpsichord purists, Gustav Leonhardt and Wanda Landowska included).

When one listens to Glenn Gould's recordings of the *Goldberg Variations*, one sees, as if for the first time, how a genius pianist approaches a piece. The *Variations* are considered by many (e.g., Dowley, 1981; Terry, 1963) to be Bach's most comprehensive keyboard composition. Yet, in 1955, the year of the first recording with which Gould made his unforgettable entrance on the world pianistic stage, one had here an austere and somewhat somber Bach piece sitting in the shelf and waiting to be rescued - not from oblivion, obviously, but from predictable interpretations. The aria that begins the *Goldberg Variations* is separated from its repetition by thirty musical pieces, organized into ten triplets, the third of which is always a remarkable canon. Here is a stupendous piece of music architecture, yet one that crumbles and falls of its own weight unless played by a genius who knows how to strike an exquisite balance between emotional detachment, serenity, and pensive sadness - and yet build up a formidable intensity at the right time, as Gould knew how to do even better than Vladimir Horowitz did in his Rachmaninoff, Schumann, and Chopin recordings.

Intensity is the key word here, for everything about Gould was intense. Otto Friedrich's recently published biography gives the reader some sense of this by providing an intelligent, exhaustively researched, and meticulous account of Gould's life and career. Without being irreverential -

quite the contrary - Friedrich's light, unpretentious, journalistic style (he is senior writer for *Time* and was managing editor for the old *Saturday Evening Post*) is well suited to the task of presenting a massive amount of information in a frank and straightforward manner. His style and approach, though, are inadequate for the task of probing the deep sources of Gould's intensity (readers who prefer an intellectually more challenging analysis of Gould may want to consult Payzant's 1978 book).

Like Samuel Beckett emaciating himself in his Paris apartment and writing ever more concise comments on dying, and Bobby Fischer, staring at this moment at the chess board in South Pasadena, Glenn Gould was a recluse and a dropout from public view. These are fragile - not haughty or arrogant - geniuses that do not wish to be bothered by the world. It is interesting that Friedrich notes that »Gould's strange pianistic gift [is akin to the phenomenal American mid-19th century chessplayer] Paul Morphy's ability to play [numerous chess games simultaneously,] blindfolded« (p. 20). Friedrich adds that »there was something uncanny, unnatural about Glenn Gould's gift, [because] most child prodigies work like galley slaves ... driven by ... authoritarian parents ... but Gould largely created himself« (p. 16).

Glenn Gould had the courage to record the *Goldberg variations* the second time, in 1981. The reason he found for this undertaking was the need, in his perception alone, for improvement. Gould wanted perfection at all cost, and he clearly dedicated the products of his unmatched style of playing to posterity. Yet the idea of a second recording was unusual for Gould because, unlike many pianists, »... once he had performed a work, taped it, edited it, spliced it, and put it, as he liked to say, 'in the can'... he not only never performed it again, but never even looked it for years on end« (Friedrich, p. 273). Friedrich quotes Gould's comments in an interview according to which he had not listened to the first version until three days before redoing it. Gould said he recognized »the fingertips of the party responsible,« but that he »could not recognize, or identify with, the *spirit* of the person who made the recording« (p. 303, italics in the original). Friedrich goes on: »Of his beautiful performance of the fifteenth variation ... Gould [said]: 'There's quite a bit of piano-playing going on there - and I mean that as the most

derogatory comment possible'« (p. 303). While anecdotal information seems to indicate that Gould's colleagues were divided in which of the recordings they preferred, empirical data bear out Gould's wish to improve (Gotlieb & Konečni, 1985). On scales such as »beautiffulness«, »desire to own«, »interestingness« and »excitingness«, Gould's 1981 version surpassed the earlier version, as well as the piano recordings by Kempff and Varsanao, and the Kirkpatrick, Landowska, and Leonhardt (1965 and 1978) harpsichord versions.

Friedrich describes in detail why Gould insisted on the *Goldberg Variations* as the beginning of his fledgling recording career, but when he searches for Gould's reasons for rerecording the same »obscure« *Variations* he says somewhat lamely: »Perhaps, as he himself said, he had been rethinking the whole work, rethinking the relationship of the parts of the whole (p. 302).« It is a pity that Friedrich chooses not to pursue - or is not equipped to do so - a sophisticated *Gestalt* analysis of the *Variations*, which seems, given the elaborate structure of the work, and its significant place in Gould's career, a promising path.

Glenn Gould championed a style of playing that is inimitable. »At any point in his career you could say, this is Gould playing, and not Alexis Weissenberg, Vladimir Horowitz, or Alicia de Laroccha« (Said, 1983, p. 45). And then there was his tremendous musical memory and mastery of the counterpoint that astonished the greatest musical minds of the day. Gould has been credited (Roddy, 1983; Said, 1983) with capturing the essence of Bach's music in a way that other musicians cannot duplicate and yet he has done so without subscribing to the traditionalist standards set by the majority of music scholars (Dutton, 1983).

Gould seemed to be driven by the idea of preserving the true meaning in music and in doing so in as technologically a superior way as was available at the time. His withdrawal from public concerts - an extremely risky thing to do from the standpoint of maintaining a successful and lucrative pianistic career - was a genius's way of preserving his equilibrium and giving himself the mental space to produce optimal renditions of selected pieces.

Actually, Glenn Gould never withdrew. He titillated his fellow

Canadians with intriguing radio documentaries and television appearances, but, more importantly, he played and recorded - on his own Steinways, through his own recording labels, and propelled by the interesting idea of rerecording details of his own recorded music.

In his *Time Magazine* review of Friedrich's book, P. Iyer (1989) points out astutely: Glenn Gould, »[i]n his determination to control everything around him, ... 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 pieces of music simply by slicing together flawless passages.«

There are many musicians and music critics who think that to interfere with recorded music is sacrilegious. Another view is to agree with Gould that the important thing is to get a piece right, and if that means recording a passage numerous times, splicing, and engaging in other forms of »creative cheating« (Gould's term), so be it.

Friedrich discusses at length Gould's provocative article »Music and Technology« which described how he manipulated a recording he had originally made on a second-rate studio piano. According to Gould (quoted in Friedrich, p. 116): »[I]f gave [the acetate] a bass cut at a hundred cycles or thereabouts and a boost at approximately five thousand, the murky, unwieldy, bass-oriented studio piano could be magically transformed.« As Friedrich succinctly puts it, Gould's goal in making a recording was »not historical authenticity but the highest possible quality« (p. 116)

For purists who claim that the recording of an uninterrupted, especially live, performance is superior to the studio products obtained by recording, splicing, and editing, Gould wrote »The Grass Is Always Greener in the Outtakes: An Experiment in Listening«. It is Friedrich's credit that he describes in some detail the interesting efforts of Gould acting as a rather sophisticated experimental music-psychologist, prompted by the basic question of whether or not people can actually tell the difference between uninterrupted and spliced recordings: »Gould created a test panel ... : six professional musicians, six audio experts, six 'laymen.' Half were men, half women. To all of these, he presented a tape of eight performances ranging from Byrd and Bach to Scriabin and

Schoenberg, from a Gould solo to a George Szell performance of part of Beethoven's Fifth. Each panelist was asked to play the half-hour tape three times and then tell how many splices could be detected (they ranged from zero to thirty-four per piece) ... Gould was happy to report that nobody came close to counting the splices correctly, and in elaborate breakdowns of the results, he was also happy to report that the professional musicians fared worst, and the 'laymen' best« (pp. 116-117). Findings worthy of being published in a musicological journal.

Gould strongly held the view that »a recording ... should be completely different from a recital, not simply reproducing a live performance but perfecting it, exploiting all the technical possibilities that could not even be attempted in the concert hall« (Friedrich, p. 117). And there is ample evidence that in order to exploit modern recording techniques, Gould developed himself into a highly competent sound engineer, making full use of his extraordinary auditory abilities.

Many things about Gould's life-pattern, and approach to performance and recording, indicate that he believed that he was touched by a higher force and that perfection was, in a sense, demanded of him. Perhaps it was not incidental that Bach's music played such a crucial part in Gould's life, for Bach often said that he composed for God alone. As Iyer says of Gould, »[T]he 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.«

Despite certain shortcomings - the central one being the inherent difficulty of a journalist capturing an extraordinary genius - Mr. Friedrich's book can be highly recommended. Among its assets are the elaborate sections on sources and on Gould's discography (The latter prepared by Nancy Canning). But any serious piano-lover may want to buy the book just for its striking back-jacket photo, which shows Glenn Gould in an as intensely intimate relationship with the piano as can be expressed visually.

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Vladimir J. Konečni