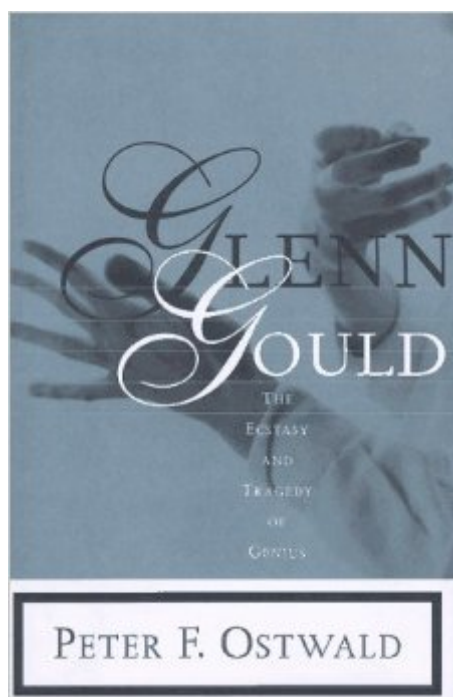


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Glenn Gould: The Ecstasy And Tragedy Of Genius



Synopsis

The Canadian pianist Glenn Gould was a child prodigy and a musical genius whose 1955 recording of Bach's "Goldberg Variations" catapulted him to world fame. He was also plagued by lifelong depression, was terrified of playing before live audiences, and consumed prescription drugs by the handful. He died at fifty of a massive stroke. In this acclaimed biography, the late psychiatrist Peter Ostwald - an accomplished violinist and longtime personal friend of Gould's - raises many questions about Gould and his music. Was his genius sponsored by eccentricity or vice versa? Do those with genius sacrifice themselves for a higher ideal while remaining personally unfulfilled? Ostwald lays bare the energy and contradiction behind Gould's brilliance.

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Customer Reviews

Glenn Gould was, by all accounts, a fascinating and extraordinary man, but difficult to know ; apart from his art, he was renowned for his perceived eccentricity, his reclusiveness, and his wish to keep his private life entirely hidden and separate from his public persona. Various books and endless articles have attempted to present a portrait of Gould, but to my mind, no writer has ever come close to the "essence" of the man; perhaps this is as Gould himself would have wished. His primary mode of communicating with the world was with his music, and music -related writing and broadcasting, and the author of this book makes that very clear. It is mostly concerned with the glorious music, not with Gould's private life, and this is how it should be. But Peter Ostwald, the author, was a doctor and a psychiatrist as well as a gifted musician,(Well, I have read that he was a gifted musician; I've never heard him play!) and does therefore concentrate on one aspect of Gould that he finds

interesting and important to understanding the man: his attitude to health, and his emotional state. Gould was, notoriously, considered to be a hypochondriac, although this is not to suggest that his ill-health was imaginary; he did indeed suffer with a number of serious health problems throughout his short life that affected his ability to play the piano. Ostwald considers these, and Gould's mental states, from a medical point of view, although he rather irritatingly does not form any definite conclusions about the roots of Gould's difficulties and does not offer the reader more than a mere suggestion of diagnosis. (there is a brief mention of the possibility that Gould had Asperger's syndrome an idea that seems to arouse the wrath of many Gould admirers!

_For many reasons Peter Ostwald appears to have borne something of a grudge against Glenn Gould. There is some explanation for this. For example, at one point, Gould allegedly dismissed Ostwald's earlier biography of Schumann with "why don't you write a book about a really important musician". But this is after Ostwald insults Gould's recording (with Laredo) of the Bach violin and keyboard sonatas. Additionally, it is true that their friendship cooled over the years, to the point that, in the last five years of Gould's life, they were not in contact at all. Ostwald implies Gould's interest in him was motivated by a desire to mooch off him in a professional capacity, by getting Ostwald, a psychiatrist, to endorse his hypochondriacal excuses for cancelling concerts, and that once Gould understood Ostwald wasn't about to play ball, Gould ended the friendship. It would be nice if Gould could present his side of the story. The tacit implication is that there could be no other reason for not wishing to be Ostwald's friend. Well, I can think of a few. Ostwald's descriptions of Gould often fairly drip with disdain. It is clear that they disagree on many personal and aesthetic levels. In the end it doesn't seem Ostwald liked Gould much. He has little good to say about his character, or even his recordings. It is hard to see what an enduring friendship was supposed to be based upon. Ostwald's musical comments are, on occasion, strikingly naive for a music biographer, and in at least one respect grossly in error. For example, he dismisses Gould/Laredo's brilliant recording of the Bach violin sonatas, but praises Gould/Menuhin's recording of the c minor sonata as "a flawless rendition". Objectively, their rendition is anything but "flawless".

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