

Glenn Gould unveiled

Anniversary exhibit explores both the personal and professional

Charles Enman, CanWest News Service

Published: Sunday, September 30, 2007

Before anything else, Glenn Gould was a virtuoso pianist, in the estimation of many, one of the greatest of the last century.

But he was also a writer, a creator of radio documentaries, a novice conductor and, not least, a pack rat -- a fact that allows the Canadian Museum of Civilization to open a wonderful Gould-centred exhibit this week marking the 75th anniversary of Gould's birth.

Glenn Gould: The Sounds of Genius, which will remain open until next August, offers clips from documentaries, awards Gould received for his recordings, furniture from his Toronto apartment and studio, letters from the maestro, pages from his diary, musical scores, and a lot of small items that mark the eccentricity that ran as much through his personality as through his playing.



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A new exhibit on Canadian pianist Glenn Gould opened Friday in Hull, Que.

Rod MacIvor, CanWest News Service

"We really do provide a broad perspective of Gould's life and career," says Sam Cronk, the museum's curator of Canadian music. "If this exhibit succeeds, it will be by

introducing sides of Glenn Gould to the Canadian public and to the world that they had not much appreciated."

At the physical centre of the exhibit are two of Gould's pianos, a Chickering and the Steinway CD318 which was first heard in Gould's recording of the Bach Two- and Three-Part Inventions, where he reported in his album cover notes the audible presence of a slight hic (much less audible than his famous humming) that the listener would have to excuse. But the CD318, which he used in many recordings, had "the most transparent sound of any piano I've ever played. I adore it," he said.

Nearby is the extremely low piano chair that his father built for him. Gould used it throughout his career, and by the end it was a cushionless shadow of its former self, offering all the support of a toilet seat.

There are many artifacts from Gould's childhood.

He said he preferred animals to people in many ways, and there are several photographs of him with beloved family dogs, as well as a set of five porcelain dog figurines and a postcard he sent from Leningrad to his collie Banquo in 1957.

Gould was known for calling his friends late at night and keeping them up for hours on the phone. Several of his phone bills, including one, from 1974, for \$1,143.99, are in the display.

For many critics, the crowning achievement of Gould's recording career was his 1981 version of Bach's Goldberg Variations, the same work he'd played for his debut recording with Columbia back in the 1950s.

The exhibit includes Gould's music of the Goldbergs, open to variation 25 and showing, in red and black ink, all the various takes he wanted included in the final edit for the video he made in his last year of life. The heavily marked page is, Cronk says, "absolutely decorative -- almost a work of art in itself."

Gould loved the Canadian north, and one of his greatest achievements was his 1967 radio documentary entitled The Idea of North, an experiment in what Gould called "contrapuntal radio." He treats the voices he has recorded as musical elements moving in and out of the acoustic foreground like voices in a fugue. The exhibit shows Gould's diagram of how the voices should be brought up or down in volume against each other -- a fascinating visual analogue to what one heard in the final editing.

Gould was an extremely moral person so it's a bit strange, then, to see evidence of a certain low-grade kleptomania. While he was touring, he would often keep the keys to his hotel rooms, and several sets are on display.

The museum hopes that the exhibit can tour widely after closing next August.