



***The Great Gould.* By Peter Goddard.** Toronto: Dundurn, 2017. 176 pp. ISBN 9781459733091.

<https://www.dundurn.com/books/Great-Gould>

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It is remarkable that even though it has been thirty-five years since the death of Canada's most famous classical musician, Glenn Gould, we still cannot seem to get enough of him: witness the continuous, unabated stream of books, articles, and scholarly dissertations about ostensibly every aspect of his life and artistry. In addition to this valuable literature, we are fortunate to have the most precious work of all: Gould's recorded legacy. As is well known, Gould's iconic 1955 performance of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*

propelled him to superstar status; the recording has never been out of print. Gould recorded exclusively and extensively for Columbia Masterworks (later Sony); and throughout the years, there have been repackagings and sonic improvements to various portions of his recordings, thereby continuously bringing his artistry to new audiences. More recently, there have been two intriguing releases: Gould's complete recordings re-mastered on eighty-one CDs, released in 2015; and the 2017 release of the complete unreleased studio recording sessions from the pianist's 1955 *Goldberg Variations*.¹

Adding to the voluminous body of literature is a new offering by Canadian music critic and writer Peter Goddard, entitled *The Great Gould*. This relatively short book, one hundred and seventy-six pages in total, is a collection of personal reminiscences and educated suppositions by Goddard about Gould—some of which have been informed from interviews undertaken by Goddard of Gould himself as well as some of the pianist's friends and professional associates.



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1. *Glenn Gould Remastered - The Complete Columbia Album Collection* (Sony Classical, 8887503222); *Glenn Gould - The Goldberg Variations - The Complete Unreleased Recording Sessions June 1955* (Sony Classical, 88843014882).

The design of the book is relatively straightforward: following a short Introduction, there are four major chapters. They are not chronological in any sense; rather each chapter contains various perspectives about a particular theme that structures that specific chapter. A short Finale and Coda conclude the text; a seven-page chronology (“The Life and Times of Glenn Gould”), Acknowledgements, and Image Credits round off the book.

Goddard presents interesting personal musings and insights about Gould. I especially enjoyed the various “alter ego” Gould narratives he puts forward in the first chapter “Enigma’s Variations”; his thoughts in the chapter entitled “The ‘Con’” about why Gould was likely so attracted to the technological achievements practiced at Columbia that he signed his 1955 recording contract with them; and Bruno Monsaingeon’s recollections of his films about Gould in the short “Finale.”

Despite these and other stimulating reminiscences Goddard presents on Gould, unfortunately several frustrating aspects mar these perceptions. First, the book needs a keen editor’s eyes to remove the not insignificant number of run-on sentences, sentences ending with prepositions, or sentence fragments (there are several instances of clauses without any verb contained within). Second, Goddard includes several intriguing photographs but provides no dates—a remarkable omission considering the care with which the author identifies the sources and, where appropriate, the copyright holder of each image in the “Image Credits” index. Further, there appears to be no serious attempt to associate the images with the text. Consider, for instance, the iconic 1967 photograph of Morley Callaghan, Ernest MacMillan, Kate Reid, A.Y. Jackson, Marshall McLuhan, and Gould walking together (although the photograph is identified to have appeared in the *Toronto Telegram*, the photographer is uncredited): while the photograph is discussed on p. 92, the image itself appears on p. 14. Another oddity is the extensive description on pp. 27-28 of Ruth Abernethy’s celebrated sculpture of Gould sitting on a bench; yet the image on p. 27 contains a close-up of only a portion of the pianist’s head. There is, to be generous, a poor attempt to cite sources discussed in the text. To mention two examples: James Francis Cooke’s *Great Pianists on Piano Playing* is discussed on p. 72 and dated 1913, while shortly thereafter John Beckwith’s important biography of Alberto Guerrero discussed on p. 73 is undated (it was published in 2011); and some excerpts of dialogue between Harry Brown and Gould from the CBC radio show *As It Happens* appear on pp. 56-57, yet the date is missing. Finally, there are occasional odd and inappropriate statements that appear seemingly out of the blue and have no meaningful relevance to the topic at hand. Consider, for instance, in setting up his narrative to compare Gould with other precocious child musicians, Goddard writes that “Same with Rose Grainger, who hustled her son Percy, an Australian-born composer, pianist, and sadomasochism aficionado” (p. 71).

To sum, *The Great Gould* is an interesting personal account of the pianist's career by one of Canada's noteworthy music critics. While Goddard's book will certainly not replace such vital contributions by Kevin Bazzana, Otto Friedrich, Peter Ostwald, and Geoffrey Payzant, it does provide some intriguing perspectives about Gould's various projects with the CBC (I especially welcomed Goddard's ideas pertaining to Gould's vision of "Place" and of the North), life at the Royal Conservatory of Music, the pianist's attraction to Petula Clark, and why Gould grew to have such a strong association with Toronto, especially once he stopped performing live.² Despite the misgivings identified above, I warmly recommend this book to Gould aficionados.

2. Kevin Bazzana, *Wondrous Strange: The Life and Art of Glenn Gould* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003); Otto Friedrich, *Glenn Gould: A Life and Variations* ([Reprint. Originally published: New York: Random House, 1989] New York: Random House (1990); Peter F. Ostwald, *Glenn Gould: The Ecstasy and Tragedy of Genius* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997); and Geoffrey Payzant, *Glenn Gould: Music & Mind* (Toronto; London: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1978).