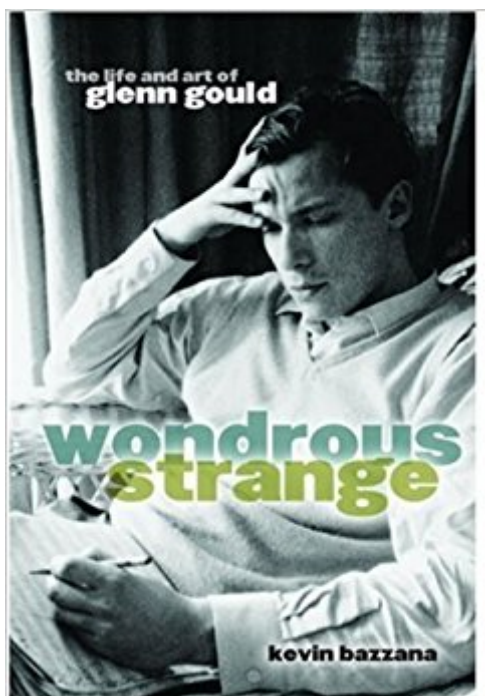


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# Wondrous Strange: The Life And Art Of Glenn Gould



## Synopsis

When Mikhail Baryshnikov defected in Toronto in 1974, he admitted that he knew only three things about Canada: It had great hockey teams, a lot of wheatfields, and Glenn Gould. In *Wondrous Strange*, Kevin Bazzana vividly recaptures the life of Glenn Gould, one of the most celebrated pianists of our time. Drawing on twenty years of intensive research, including unrestricted access to Gould's private papers and interviews with scores of friends and colleagues, many of them never interviewed before, Bazzana sheds new light on such topics as Gould's family history, his secretive sexual life, and the mysterious problems that afflicted his hands in his later years. The author places Gould's distinctive traits--his eccentric interpretations, his garish onstage demeanor, his resistance to convention--against the backdrop of his religious, upper middle-class Canadian childhood, illuminating the influence of Gould's mother as well as the lasting impact of the only piano teacher Gould ever had. Bazzana offers a fresh appreciation of Gould's concert career--his high-profile but illness-plagued international tours, his adventurous work for Canadian music festivals, his musical and legal problems with Steinway & Sons. In 1964, Gould made the extraordinary decision to perform only for records, radio, television, and film, a turning point that the author examines with unprecedented thoroughness (discussing, for example, his far-seeing interest in new recording technology). Here, too, are Gould's interests away from the piano, from his ambitious but failed effort to be a composer to his innovative brand of "contrapuntal radio." Richly illustrated with rare photographs, *Wondrous Strange* is a superbly written account of one of the most memorable and accomplished musicians of our times.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

More than two decades after his death at the age of 50, Glenn Gould remains one of the most famous (and in some circles controversial) pianists of the 20th century. Bazzana, who previously wrote a musicological study of Gould's technique, broadens his focus to encompass the performer's brief life in an engaging biography that will captivate classical music lovers and casual listeners alike. Nimble analysis explores the influences of various composers on Gould's playing style while avoiding technical jargon. More importantly Bazzana portrays Gould as a vivid, engaging personality-no mean feat considering his subject withdrew from the concert stage in 1964 and spent the following 18 years addressing the public only through studio recordings and other electronic media. Bazzana confronts all the major clichés that have built up around Gould's history and then makes a persuasive argument against considering them as an indication of mental illness, suggesting that eccentricities like refusing to shake hands and sitting in a custom-designed piano chair were for the most part no more unusual than the habits adopted by any dedicated artist. He also provides ample evidence that the most widely spread stories obscure how resolutely normal Gould was (and, one repeatedly discovers, utterly and charmingly Canadian). For those who already love Gould's performances with all his extraneous noises, this biography provides welcome and equal insight into his life and music, while anyone new to the subject may not even want to wait until finishing the book to run out and buy their first CD. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Opinion on the eccentric Canadian pianist Glenn Gould is polarized between idolatry and detestation. Bazzana's portrait "the most balanced yet" ingeniously provides contexts for Gould's behavior, situating his hermeticism in the dour Anglo world of mid-century Toronto. A keen deflater of myths, Bazzana shows that Gould, often assumed to be asexual or gay, had a number of quasi-girlfriends, though his need for solitude always came first. Similarly, although it's true that he sued Steinway, alleging injury from an employee's effusive greeting, among friends handshakes were common. Still, those for whom the eccentricities are half the fun will find endless delight in the meticulous accounts of Gould's diet, hypochondria, and near-suicidal driving. "It's true that I've driven through a number of red lights on occasion," he once said, "but on the other hand, I've stopped at a lot of green ones but never gotten credit for it." Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker

I will admit to having an obsession with the life and art of Glenn Gould. I had the privilege to hear him in concert in the early '60's. I have never forgotten that moment. Over the years I have amassed a collection of GG recordings and listen to them frequently. I also have a comprehensive GG library collection. I bought this book in 2005 and just now got around to reading it. I believe this to be the definitive biography of this remarkable genius. It is extremely well written, detailed, outstandingly researched, fair and informative. It is clearly the best book about GG of the many I have read. I highly recommend it to anyone who has enjoyed listening to a Gould recording and is interested in learning more about this unique artist.

I can't exactly put a nail on why I have read so many biographies on Gould, but I dare say the story of his reclusiveness, isolation and his pursuit of his art has always intrigued me. Up to this point my favorite biography on Gould had been the Otto Fredrick "A Life in Variations", so I had a pre-conceived notion that this book may just have been a re-telling of all the stories and interviews I heard in the past. Bazzana appears to set himself apart here in that he was not asked to write a biography on Gould as he described in the book. There are many snippets of things I've already knew about Gould here, but Bazzana also tries to put another angle on some of the eccentricities most have heard or read about prior. He encapsulates many different views of Gould, so much so that I feel that I have a bit more insight here. Also, Bazzana appears to set some of the record straight for other biographical sources such as Andrew Kazdin's work called "Glenn Gould At Work, Creative Lying" which is another book I gained knowledge from and did enjoy. It may not be entirely possible to have a true biographical account of Gould, but I still appreciate this additional account of his life although I am only giving it 4 stars because I feel there will never be a complete biography of an individual due to different sources and views, but this one is generally well researched. It does re-hash some of the other interview material, sources etc, but within the book there does appear to be an attempt here to rationalize his behaviour and give a better look beyond the stereotype.

A comprehensive reflection on a very ordinary man with an extraordinary gift. For him, it was just the way his mind worked. The book delves into tedious musical detail, but so did Gould. I think he would have been a happier man if he could have escaped the public eye, but his ability put him in the forefront and at the same time, it cast him out. He was not comfortable being the monkey who could perform tricks. This is a good read.

Excellent. Of the six biographies on Glenn Gould that I have read, this is the most fair and best-written. Recommended.

This unstoppably heartrending biography of Canadian pianist Glenn Gould unveils the mysteries of a perfect art more cogently and beautifully than has any other artist's biography I've ever come across. Kevin Bazzana has opened up Gould's eccentricities and placed them where finally they must sleep - merely deep in the natural whole of one of the inescapable musicians of the 20th century. Those lucky enough to know the meaning of the art of Glenn Gould will always be grateful for that achievement. This is a tremendous book. The moments when Bazzana's utterly secure love for Gould's art shines through are the most extraordinary aspect of a completely worthy biography. With deep and glistening writing Bazzana evokes every aspect of looking-at-Gould with the same sound character found in Gould's playing - it's an amazing experience! This is biographical literature extensive and schooled, and even wise; reading is like gliding on glass, so perfect is the author's determination, and Gould lives on every page. What could be better? Was ever a pianist's art more wonderful? Gould's playing is always extraordinary by every standard, and beyond. And not only the playing, of course; his mind, his understanding of music, his humor - these form the scaffolding of a remarkable artistic vision. For all his reclusion, his is the most giving human art, reaching to infinity. Art of the gods obtains dimensions the proof of which can be heard in everything he played. It's a consuming art, yet so freeing. The wondrous thing about it is how Gould kept so much of himself even as he spent lavishly on Bach and Byrd and Schoenberg. Music never overtook Gould - that task inevitably fell to Gould himself. By literature of this kind, the sadness that still lingers around Gould's death seems entirely transformed. This is a great book that ends too quickly and lingers too pervasively. Afford yourself the wealth.

Excellent account of the life and art of Glenn Gould. Hard to put down. Provides great insight into Gould's interpretations and performances as well as the mysteries surrounding his persona and mannerisms.

Learnt so much about GG the man and now understand what it took to have achieved all that he did.

Shipped quickly, very pleased with it.

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