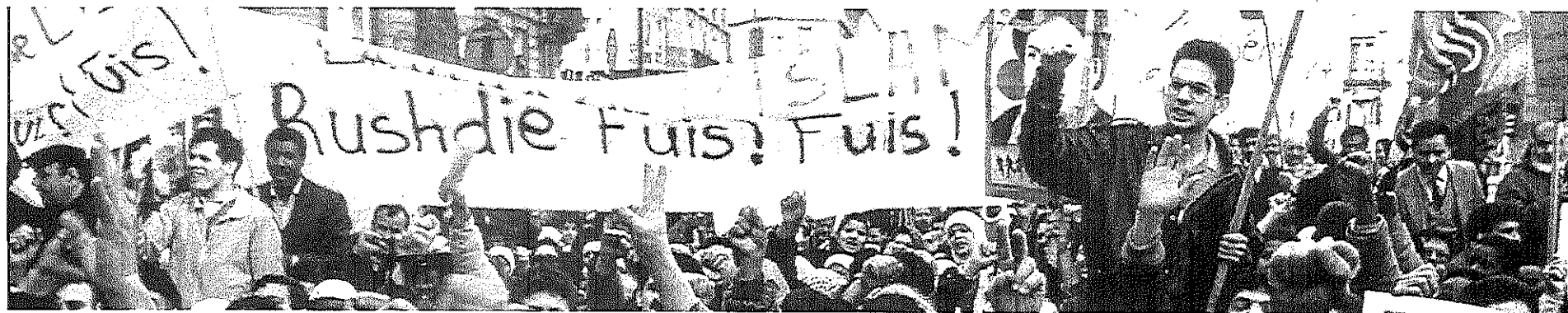


BOOKS RUSHDIE'S MOMENT

Joseph Anton isn't merely its author's best work, it is urgently relevant **BOOKS, PAGE 16**



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MUSIC

THE MEANING OF GOULD

A modern-day mash-up of old friends, latter-day proteges and (occasionally wavering) admirers gathers this weekend to mark the fabled pianist's 80th birthday. As **Kate Taylor** writes, 30 years after his death, the debate is far from settled on whether Glenn Gould was a puritanical classicist of the first order or a cultural prophet on par with Marshall McLuhan, Harold Innis and Northrop Frye



KATE TAYLOR
ktaylor@globeandmail.com

If Glenn Gould were alive today, he would be celebrating his 80th birthday, posting to his blog, releasing another podcast and figuring out how to license downloads of his recordings. Or maybe he would just be hunkered down at the piano playing the work of a dead European composer when not hiding out at classic Toronto diner Fran's, eating rice pudding.

The multifaceted Gould is a kind of Rorschach test for Canadians. Would you like to see him as a digital prophet, the forward-looking recording artist and broadcaster who called for a democracy that would elevate the audience to the level of the performer and who predicted our mash-up culture? Or perhaps you prefer the child of WASP Toronto, the control freak who obsessed over the quality of his recordings,

partisan of Bach and Schoenberg. "You have to get behind the cliché he was just a rebel," says Canadian pianist and music producer Chilly Gonzales. "There were moments he played into the caricature and there were a lot of moments when he was extremely conservative."

Gonzales is one of many participants at a gathering this weekend at the University of Toronto that marks the 80th anniversary of Gould's birth. It is the forward-looking Gould who is mainly on display at the event - entitled Dreamers, Renegades, Visionaries: the Glenn Gould Variations - which is infused with the belief that Gould not only predicted but would also heartily endorse our interactive culture of downloading, sampling and remixing.

"Glenn now could spend the morning working on a piece, record it in the afternoon, and send it out to his admirers in the evening. I think he would probably have been a blogger and he would definitely have got rid of the record company," suggests Tim Page, a professor of music and journalism at the University of Southern California. **Gould, Page 11**

Gould eschewed Chopin, embraced Petula Clark, and recognized the personal home hi-fi as a crystal ball of our democratic digital world.

FURTHER READING

FROM PAGE 1

Gould: Was the famously strict classicist an oracle of music's digital age?

» He had an intense telephone friendship with Gould in the last years of his life, when Page was working as a music critic in New York. "The Internet was made for Glenn Gould," says Page, "and I am just sorry he never got to play with it."

Instead, others will be doing some playing for him. Filmmaker Atom Egoyan, for example, is contributing an outdoor installation that features a giant version of a child's tin-can-and-string device, because he is most interested in Gould's experiments with sound. "I was surprised by his early decision to go digital, to manipulate his recordings, to make the studio his art form," says Egoyan, who remembers, as a boy in Victoria, listening to Gould's CBC Radio broadcasts about music, culture and technology.

Of course, Gould's career predated digital recording, and Egoyan knows that the musician's painstaking splicing of his own recordings in the studio was done using analogue technology. The slip of the tongue is telling, for many of the participants perceive Gould, who died in 1982, as digital in spirit if not in fact, a wholly contemporary artist.

They point out that the classical pianist's interest in the work of pop singer Petula Clark foresaw the current blurring of the line between high art and pop culture. They note he argued that recorded music was not a snapshot of a performance but rather a separate art form that would eventually be recognized as such, just as film had been recognized as separate from theatre. And most of all, they celebrate how Gould, extrapolating from the way the home hi-fi listener could fiddle about with the volume, treble and bass, predicted a more democratic, more interactive relationship between the recording artist and the audience.

"He could talk about things that seemed like sci-fi at the time but turned out to be the remix culture," says jazz composer and pianist Ron Davis, co-artistic director of the U of T event. Specifically, Gould advanced the notion that recording artists would one day offer listeners the building blocks to create their own musical experience rather than presenting them with finished recordings.

Davis places Gould, whose birthday is Tuesday, in a line of 20th-century Canadian intellectuals who thought about communications and mass media, from Harold Innis to Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye.

People have sometimes quipped that Gould is Canada's Elvis, the musical figure whose star burns even brighter after death, and Davis sees more than a joke in the comparison: "Elvis represented a huge swath of American culture. Gould represented Canadian culture of the period - McLuhan, Frye - publicly accessible but brilliant. In the U.S., it was the showman; here, it was modest brilliance."

Of course, Gould was never modest about his talents - and not always right in his predictions.

"He was wrong on a lot of things," Page says of his old friend. "He used to say the concert would die out by the year 2000 and the record company would rule."

Today, as performers who have lost recording income to downloading rely on concerts to make a living, it's fair to express some skepticism about an unbridled enthusiasm for Gould's techno-



Gould in 1956, before a trip to Moscow at the height of the Cold War. CP

logical vision. If Gould the visionary predicted a more democratic musical future, what would Gould the control freak have made of admirers sampling his recordings to create contemporary pop tunes (as one young radio DJ is doing for the U of T event) or downloading music for free?

"My guess is that he was a good enough businessman, you would have probably paid for his downloads," Page says. "He would have figured out something. He had an interesting and unconventional brain."

The paradox of Gould was that behind the musical brilliance and

technological precision was always the fragile human element, the lonely man who spent hours on the phone with a few close friends who describe him as generous and funny. He is not easy to box in. "He offers so many ideas to take off from. He's this protean figure," Egoyan says.

In those meticulous recordings, above Gould's analytical piano music, you can sometimes hear the lyrical sound of a man humming as he plays.

ONLINE

A Gould-inspired app

DIGGING INTO GOULD

Dreamers, Renegades, Visionaries: The Glenn Gould Variations takes place at the University of Toronto today and tomorrow. Here are some highlights.

HORNED FROG VIDEOS

Ten years ago, American Robert Wilson, best known as an experimental theatre director, was dining al fresco with a Malaysian prince in Bali, listening to both Glenn Gould's recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and the sound of frogs croaking in a nearby pond. He reproduces the beauty of that moment with a series of intensely colourized video portraits of South American horned frogs whose gentle sounds of croaking and splashing are accompanied by Gould's piano playing. (They are on display at the U of T Art Centre until Oct. 6.)

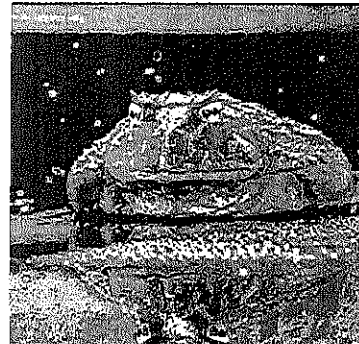
"I know it is totally absurd, ridiculous to do something for his anniversary, but it was this personal moment," says Wilson, adding that Gould's music confirmed his own interest in the structure of sound. "How do I see something, how do I hear something, and how do I hear two things simultaneously?"

MACROPHONE

Atom Egoyan has returned to a child's first experiment transmitting sound: a string strung between two tin cans. With the help of stage designer Camelia Koo, Egoyan has created oversized cans with multiple strings. His Macrophone has been erected on King's College Circle, where the public is welcome to try it out. "When I think of Gould, I think of ... how we hear and broadcast sound," Egoyan says, adding that his creation is "a child's fantasy of mass media. The biggest surprise will be if it actually works."

CHILLY GONZALES

The Canadian pianist, producer and trickster will be channeling Gould in his stage



A Robert Wilson horned frog.

appearance this weekend. He calls his widow's-peak hairline Gouldian and shares the pianist's preference for a low position at the piano: Gonzales actually plays on a Swiss-made, limited-edition replica of the famous Gould chair. But Gould's influence on his career, he stresses, is not musical, but a lesson about when to break rules and when to respect them. "Glenn Gould is the John McEnroe of the piano: rule-breaking and not rule-breaking" Gonzales says, referring to the tempestuous tennis master.

GOULD'S DNA

Three young McLuhanite musical producers are taking Gould's speculation about how listeners might one day experiment with recordings and bringing it into the mash-up age. With Billy Iannaci on piano and computer, and Andrew Testa on drums, DJ LRS (a.k.a. Sam Pereira) is sampling Gould's music and turning the notes into contemporary pop tunes. "We are showing how Gould's ideas 60 years ago pretty well predicted all that is happening in music production today," Pereira says, identifying himself as what Gould called the "uninvited guest at the banquet of the arts. People who aren't classically trained can make music using a computer."

Their work, entitled Gould's DNA, is a 10-minute video featuring the new music and showing how it was created.

Kate Taylor

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