

GLENN GOULD: brief comments of the music critic, Peter Gutmann, written for Sony Records (2002).

The late Canadian pianist Glenn Gould was *weird*. Compared to his bizarre routines, the petulant attitudes and outrageous demands of spoiled rock and movie stars seem downright normal. But often it takes a spark of madness to kindle the fires of genius, especially in the arts. Gould left a fabulous legacy of brilliant and fascinating recordings.

Just how weird was he? Consider this:

- He was a world-class hypochondriac. He feared drafts and cold, wearing heavy sweaters, scarves, gloves and overcoats even in the hottest weather. He was terrified of germs, refusing to go to a hospital to visit his dying mother. He was frightened by physical contact, canceling a dozen concerts and suing after a piano-tuner jostled him. He gobbled vast amounts of pills in lieu of food.
- He crouched below the keyboard, sitting 14 inches off the floor on a chair his father had built and which he insisted on using his entire life. He refused to have it reupholstered, and so after the original padding wore away it became a medieval torture device, with only a single narrow beam running down the middle of the seat from front to back, forcing his entire body weight onto his groin.
- When he played he seemed utterly oblivious to his surroundings, swaying soulfully and waving a free hand as if conducting himself, his mouth and face contorted in constant expressive motion. His mother (and first teacher) was a vocal coach who had him sing notes as he played them, a habit he never lost and which remains all too apparent throughout his records. He studied music with loud random noise (such as several blaring radios or TVs).

Creativity and Madness: The Complexity of Richter and Gould's Genius - and a bit of Madness

The diagnosis of mental illness can be seen as a reductive process. Complexity is the fundamental condition of human behavior. Diagnosis takes a set of general conditions (symptoms/behaviors) that when applied to the individual simplify that complexity: The potential for distortion is inherent.

But what events in Richter's or Gould's early development caused both pianists to make their unique *adaptation*? *The explanation is complex and non-linear; a slight shift in their early formation may have altered their development and shaped their perception of the world. Their 'genius' may have expanded exponentially, but at a cost of internal turmoil.*

The recent article in the **NYTIMES** on the strange, inner need of the Soviet pianist, **Svatislav Richter**, to have near him a *plastic lobster* while he performed on stage is more than quirky, unsettling, and certainly non-linear. The oddness of Richter's compulsive need is more than matched by another 20th century pianist, the Canadian **Glenn Gould**. Gould's genius at the keyboard emerged at an early age (his *Goldberg Variations* of J S Bach was recorded when he was still a teenager).

The article on **Richter** by Errol Morris is a lavish treat of exploration of the mind of Richter and excellent commentary follows. Peruse it for the delight of it.

in **Gould**'s case his need for all sort of 'armor' - gloves, scarves, sitting on a low chair while playing, gradually rejecting performance for studio recordings only, preferring to be out of in daylight, and by degrees, rejecting the direct contact with former friends in lieu of telephone-initiated contacts on his own terms. His isolation increased and so did his fear of germs, etc. His attachment to a worn-out studio Steinway (CD 318), a piano with a defective middle G (!?) is a story in itself. He insisted of recording only with this instrument! Morris makes reference to this in his article.

The comments of **Peter Guttmann** on Gould could be expanded to include the many volumes written on Gould's unique genius and true weirdness.

What was going on with these two monumental artists? And what is the connection between madness and creativity?