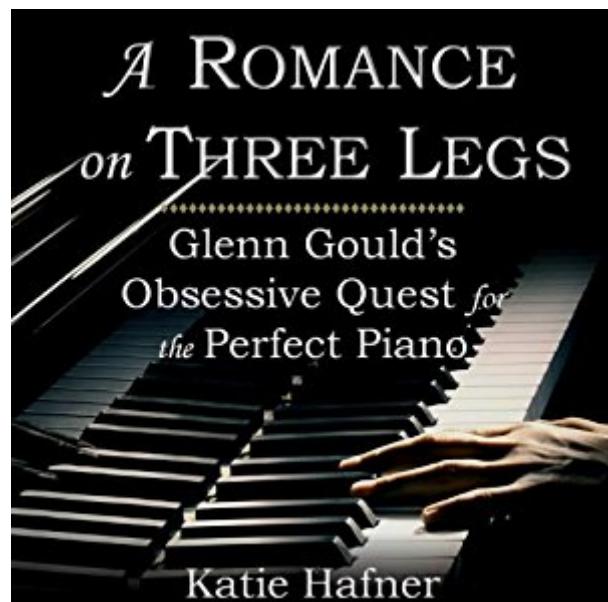


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A Romance On Three Legs: Glenn Gould's Obsessive Quest For The Perfect Piano



Synopsis

Hugely talented and famously eccentric, pianist Glenn Gould fought a running battle with a long list of less than perfect pianos. *A Romance on Three Legs* is the story of a love that changed Gould's life: his partnership with the Steinway CD 318, a piano whose peculiar action and temperament ushered Gould closer than ever to interpretive perfection. Katie Hafner weaves the compelling tale of Gould, his favorite piano, and the men who worked on it, revealing new details and nuances in the work and mind of one of the twentieth century's greatest artists.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A Romance on Three Legs by Katie Hafner is a masterfully written story about Glenn Gould and his love for a Steinway piano called CD318. He found the love of his life long after he had become one of the most revered concert pianists and interpreters of Bach. Hafner tells about Gould's long search for his "perfect piano" which often involved skirmishes with the Steinway Co. who counted him as one of their most prestigious Steinway Artists. Hafner relates how, quite by accident, Gould found the instrument of his dreams covered with dust in the back of Eaton's Department Store in Toronto. It was about to be shipped back to Steinway in New York. How this piano became the realization of Gould's ideal instrument involves the story of a blind boy, Verne Edquist, born in rural Saskatchewan. How Verne managed to rise from his poverty and handicap to be a very skilled technician and tuner of concert grands and Gould's personal assistant for many years is a moving story which goes hand in hand with CD318's story. Hafner has carefully researched the history of the Steinway Co. and its

method of producing a concert grand piano. She tells in fascinating detail the intricate and labor intensive construction of the Steinway piano. Despite the technicalities of Hafner's description of this process, the reader will be able to understand and fully appreciate the making of the "Instrument of the Immortals."

If someone would have told me that I would be up reading this book at 2:00 am learning how someone voices a Steinway Piano, I would have said that they were nuts. But, it was true. Once I entered this Romance on Three Legs, I needed to hear how massaging of the felt, lacquering the soundboard and needling the hammers made each piano a unique sound and of unique personality. Katie Hafner has taken this true story and created this wonderful voyage through intertwined stories of love and compassion. The feature story is about this eccentric, gifted pianist [Glenn Gould] and his search for his 88 key, life partner. But via Hafner's weaving of extraordinary detail, I found myself feeling close to this unloved, unappreciated, abandoned World War orphan piano [Steinway unit number CD318] and its quest for a caring home. Eventually the two find each other. Then another compelling love story emerges. This one is about a once great manufacturer and its courtship of customers. Hafner takes us into the foundation and history of a last century institution called Steinway Piano. Like our 'Breakfast of Champions' [Wheaties], we learn how Steinway goes to extraordinary measures to become known as the "Instrument of the Immortals". For a while you feel that both romances are on safe footing. Then disaster strikes both. Don't think of this book as a story written for students of music. This is a rich and enjoyable voyage about people, companies and their obsessive quest for perfection.

An engrossing account of concert pianist Glenn Gould's search for the perfect instrument. He had already passed out of his teen prodigy stage when, in 1960, he found a battered Steinway grand in the back of an auditorium in Toronto. The CD 318, as it was known, was old and out of tune, but one touch of the keyboard and the artist apparently recognized his inanimate soul-mate. For almost a decade, Gould and a nearly-blind technician would toil over the piano in the pursuit of "perpetual refinement." The pair were searching for, what the author describes as, a "dry, clean, light" tone, something akin to a harpsichord's. And they were still inching toward perfection, when the CD 318 met its tragic demise. Hafner's keen eye and ear illuminate a world where tones take on the characteristics of colors-- and the qualities of fine wines. There's never a false step, and her style is so hypnotic and personal that even the laymen among us come to love this ugly duckling of grands.

This book has inspired me to leave my first-ever review. Katie Hafner's masterful storytelling captivated me from page one and didn't lose me even once in 232 pages. She weaves the stories of the tortured Gould, his treasured concert grand and his surpassing tuner into a yarn so rich in carefully researched detail that you feel you're alongside Gould for every fateful turn in his "obsessive quest for the perfect piano." The deeply human drama includes artful explanations of the technology of piano-making and tuning in the early chapters --just enough to usher any non-musician into the rarefied orbit in which the piano known as CD 318 becomes an irresistible love object, not only for Gould but also for the reader. The writing is beautiful and economical, making for a quick read that is also intellectually rewarding. Besides all that, it's a fascinating--alternately hilarious, uplifting and heartbreaking--exposition on the creative soul.

If you happened upon The New York Times book review of Romance, forget it. Read the Newsweek one instead [...] which is right on target. This is a marvelous story about the brilliant, eccentric Gould, the business-savvy Steinway Company, the unsung heroes also known as piano tuners, and most of all, about the sweet mysteries of the instrument itself. Every piano is unique, with its own personality, touch, tone and power (or lack of it). Hafner, a first-rate journalist who's done meticulous research, never forgets this focus, and everything in the book--the details about how a piano is made, regulating, voicing, tuning, the intensive care and feeding required by these fussy, high maintenance creatures--helps you understand what Gould was looking for and why. It's also a fun read. I savored it on the beaches of Virgin Gorda, so even though I was already in heaven, this book made my vacation all the more memorable.

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