

GLENN GOULD STUDIO

By Paul Mills

Glenn Gould Studio is unique in North America. It is a combined recording studio and public concert hall, designed principally for recording and broadcasting classical music and other radio performance programming. Since the CBC is the largest producer and distributor of classical music in Canada, it was natural for us to incorporate this facility in the new Canadian Broadcasting Centre in Toronto.

Architect John Burgee and acoustician Niels Jordan worked to stringent criteria. The space must possess superior acoustic properties, optimized for the performance and recording of classical music, but also suitable for light music and spoken word, with a reverberation time of 1.6 seconds. It also had to comfortably seat an audience of 340 people, each of whom would enjoy an equally good listening and viewing perspective. It must have a pleasing appearance: modern, yet respectful of classical traditions. And all of this has to be done on an extremely tight budget. The design team rose to the occasion magnificently. Everyone realized that this was a rare and welcome opportunity to create a true centre of excellence in performance, design and technology.

The studio measures approximately 60 feet wide by 90 feet long by 35 feet high. Its proportions are those of the classic "shoebox" concert hall, like such renowned musical venues as Symphony Hall in Boston and the Musikverein in Vienna. The interior design of the hall echoes the architecture of the building which houses it. A "super grid" on the walls is interrupted by angular and cylindrical shapes of different colours and textures. These design elements break up and diffuse reflected sound waves, resulting in a smooth and pleasing reverberation.

The construction materials were also chosen for their acoustical properties. Wood and plaster are the time-tested ingredients of many of the world's best concert halls. In Glenn Gould Studio, the walls and ceiling are plaster; the irregular shapes are constructed out of a plastic-wood laminate; wood is also used extensively on the floor, stage, seats, and the "clouds" suspended over the stage. The absorptive and reflective properties of certain components can be adjusted to "fine-tune" the room. The result is a warm and resonant sound which rivals the world's best small concert halls.

Connected to the studio, at stage left, is the control room which is equipped with the latest state-of-the-art 48-track digital recording technology. It is here that the creative alchemy of our finest recording engineers and producers will result in great live broadcasts and recordings. There are two announce booths: one adjacent to the control room and another high up at the back of the hall. Both were used for the bilingual live broadcast of the studio's official opening concert on Glenn Gould's sixtieth anniversary, September 25, 1992.

Also backstage are well-equipped dressing rooms, warm-up areas, stage management facilities, and an instrument storage room. Out front, a spacious and attractive foyer and lobby welcome visitors. The lobby houses a permanent Glenn Gould display, including his famous and beloved Chickering piano.

Everyone at CBC is extremely proud of Glenn Gould Studio. It is an inviting and accessible new public performance space that complements existing facilities in the Metro Toronto area and offers specialized and distinctive benefits for performers, producers and audiences. It has quickly gained a reputation across Canada and around the world as a place where great music and other fine performance programming can be enjoyed in a superb listening environment.

Paul Mills acted as one of the chief Radio Planners from the initial stages through to the building of the Canadian Broadcasting Centre.