



PRESS RELEASE

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Media events:

July 11

Virtual Acoustic Environment Demonstration, 5:30 – 6pm

Wenger Room, 2nd floor of Drew Fine Arts Building,
Hamline University

Hear Glenn Gould Play “Live”, 6:30-7:30pm

Sundin Hall, Hamline University

‘VIRTUAL’ PERFORMANCES AT MINNESOTA’S PIANO-E-COMPETITION

ST. PAUL, July 10—Glenn Gould’s revolutionary recording of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* was first released in 1956. A new technology developed by Zenph Studios allows listeners to hear this gramophone classic performed “live,” as if they were sitting in the original studio with Gould himself.

On July 11 at 6:30pm in Sundin Music Hall at Hamline University, Dr. John Q. Walker, president of Zenph Studios, will showcase excerpts from Gould’s performance and

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‘Virtual Performances at Minnesota’s Piano-e-Competition

explain the technology involved. Utilizing the 1956 recording, Zenph’s software was able to determine the precise keystrokes, pedal movements, and micro-timings that constituted Gould’s original performance and convert this information into high-resolution digital data. This data in turn activates the keys and pedals of a Yamaha Disklavier, which is a modern version of the traditional reproducing player piano. The end result is a live piano performance that recreates Gould’s performance with exceptional fidelity.

“Our [Zenph’s] process is a leap beyond the recording to the original performance itself,” says Walker. “The process even snares the individual notes within dense harmonies, so each can be reproduced with their individual shades of touch and dynamics. In a modern recording studio, the recreated performance can then become a high quality recording that takes listeners back to the original moment when the artist was at work. It’s truly striking to hear the difference between a source recording and our finished product.” After hearing the demonstration of Gould’s *Goldberg Variations*, Malcolm Lester, executive director of the Glenn Gould Foundation, said, “As many times as I’ve heard the ’55 Goldbergs, it was like hearing them for the first time.”

Zenph’s breakthrough has many important implications for the music industry. Now, for example, piano recordings made in monaural can be re-created in surround-sound or stereo. Old recordings made on outdated sound equipment, or played on out-of-tune instruments, can yield modern, high-quality CDs of the same performances. A chance recording of a jazz artist’s off-the-cuff improvisation can be re-performed, re-recorded, or printed as sheet music.

Before this development, a standard approach to sub-par recordings has been to clean them up or to re-master them by filtering out noise and hiss. However, re-mastering can only accomplish so much: problems associated with clarity, acoustics, tuning, and the quality of the original instrument and recording equipment remain. Furthermore, the filtering process can strip away subtle nuances integral to the performance.

‘Virtual Performances at Minnesota’s Piano-e-Competition

The July 11 demonstration of Zenph’s technology is part of the Third International Piano-e-Competition, which is taking place through July 14 at Hamline University in St. Paul and Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis. The competition utilizes the same technology that is capable of re-performing Gould’s *Variations*. Last February, sixty young pianists, chosen from an initial field of over 130 applicants, auditioned on Yamaha Disklaviers at four sites around the world. Their performances were then transmitted to a Disklavier at Hamline University, where they were judged by a six-member screening panel. The twenty-six finalists who were invited to Minnesota are now competing on Disklaviers, so that their performances can be livestreamed to the Internet and re-produced on Disklaviers throughout the world.

Edisher Savitsky, twenty-nine, from the Republic of Georgia, is one of the six contestants still vying for the grand prize, which includes a 6’1” Yamaha Disklavier. He says that his friends in the Republic of Georgia and around the world are watching his performances online. The technology “gives you the idea that you’re playing for a larger audience. It helps you to look beyond the competition—your audience is larger than the people present in the hall,” he says.

Another technological aspect of the Piano-e-Competition is that contestants can simulate the recital hall experience prior to their performance. Earlier this year, the Wenger Corporation released modular practice rooms, called Virtual Acoustic Environments. In order to increase the amount of practice space for competitors, two Wenger rooms have been temporarily installed at Hamline University. The rooms allow the pianists to simulate nine virtual settings, including that of a recital hall. The competitors thus can practice their performance pieces in an environment that closely resembles the performance setting. The technology of the rooms also allows the pianist to record him or herself in order to analyze his or her performance.

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