

Beethoven – Piano Concerto no.5 – Glenn Gould (1966)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat major ('Emperor'), Op. 73: 1. Allegro*
2. *Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat major ('Emperor'), Op. 73: 2. Adagio un poco moto - attacca:*
3. *Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat major ('Emperor'), Op. 73: 3. Rondo. Allegro*

Glenn Gould – piano
American Symphony Orchestra
Leopold Stokowski – conductor

Glenn Gould and Leopold Stokowski's 1966 Columbia recording of Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto is so entertaining that trying not to laugh out loud while listening would make a good drinking game. The two can't seem to agree on the essential character of the piece, and hearing them argue back and forth is downright hilarious. First, Stokowski and the American Symphony land with both feet on a big fat orchestral tutti, then Gould enters and nonchalantly noodles his way up the piano to the slowest trill in creation. Stokowski jumps on a second tutti and Gould picks up the thread and wanders off into another lazy trill, humming all the way (as he always did while playing). Stokowski slams a third tutti and Gould rambles. If Groucho Marx was conducting and Chico Marx was playing the piano, it couldn't be any funnier. So it goes with Stokowski playing the music as if it's essentially heroic and Gould playing it as if it's meant for Looney Tunes. In the end, Stokowski proves the more stubborn, and he never allows the performance to give over to Gould's blandishments. While it's undeniably odd to hear two musicians argue so noticeably in performance -- Stokowski with his mainstream Romanticism, Gould with his straight-faced Dadaism -- one cannot help but enjoy the ride. ---James Leonard, Rovi

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