

Beethoven
Shane Koyczan

Listen
his father
made a habit
out of hitting him
see
some men drink
some men yell
some men hit their children
this man
did it all
because I guess all men
want their boys
to be geniuses

Beethoven

little boy
living in a house
where a name meant nothing
living in a house
where mercy had to be earned
through each perfect note
tumbling up through the roof
to tickle the toes of angels
whose harps
couldn't hold half the passion
that was held in the hands
of a young boy
who was hard of hearing

Beethoven

who heard
his father's anthem
every time he put finger
to ivory
it was not good enough
so he played slowly
not good enough
so he played softly
not good enough
so he played strongly
and when he could play no more
when his fingers cramped up
into the gnarled roots of tree trunks
it was
not good enough

Beethoven

a musician
without his most precious tool
his eardrums
could no longer pound out rhythms
for the symphonies playing in his mind
he couldn't hear the audiences clapping
couldn't hear the people loving him
couldn't hear the women in the front row whispering

Beethoven

as they let the music
invade their nervous system
like an armada marching through
firing cannonballs
detonating every molecule in their bodies
into explosions of heavenly sensation
each note
leaving track marks
over every inch of their bodies
making them ache
for one more hit
he was an addiction
and kings/queens
it didn't matter
the man got down on his knees
for no one
but amputated the legs of his piano
so he could feel the vibrations
through the floor
the man got down on his knees
for music
and when the orchestra played his symphonies
it was the echoes of his father's anthem
repeating itself
like a brok-broken recor-brok-broken record
it was
not good enough
so they played slowly
not good enough
so they played softly
not good enough
so they played strongly
not good enough
so they tried to mock the man
make fun of the madness
by mimicking the movements
holding their bows
a quarter of an inch above the strings

not making a sound
it was

perfect

see
the deaf have an intimacy with silence
it's there in their dreams
and the musicians turned to one another
not knowing what to make of the man
trying to calculate
the distance between madness and genius
realizing that Beethoven's musical measurements
could take you to distances
reaching past the towers of Babylon
turning solar systems into symbols
that crashed together
causing comets to collide
creating crescendos that were so loud
they shook the constellations
until the stars began to fall from the sky
and it looked like the entire universe
had begun to cry

distance must be an illusion
the man must be
a genius

Beethoven

his thoughts moving at the speed of sound
transforming emotion into music
and for a moment
it was like joy
was a tangible thing
like you could touch it
like for the first time
we could watch love and hate dance together
in a waltz of such precision and beauty
that we finally understood
the history wasn't important
to know the man
all we ever had to do was

listen.