

Poetry Porch: Poetry

Love Affair with Piano

By Donna Emerson

Whether boogie-woogie, classical, or modern,
I loved to hear my mother play the piano.
We danced in the playroom to her rhythms.

When I turned five she began to teach me the notes,
smacked my hands when I made a mistake.
I knew then to ask for a teacher.

Teachers came and went as we moved across two states.
When I turned thirteen, Mr. Ribble, the one who cried
when I played Chopin, moved away.

He said it wasn't my playing,
it was that his father had died at thirty-nine,
like Chopin.

Mother never looked for another teacher
and I pretended it didn't matter.
Was glad to turn to boys and free time after school.

As years passed I missed playing.
It wasn't the same when I just played sheet music
or Christmas carols, having stopped short in the romantic period.

College, marriage, children, whose lessons I attended,
taking notes about violin, harpsichord, and piano
learning things I didn't know
made me want to return, even resent the extended breach.

I begin piano lessons again. I marvel that I still know
the notes, the symbols, even half of the circle of fifths.
Eat up new learnings as if starving.

Turns! New trills! Mordants! Original sonatas, not the simplified version!
Holding a note through an entire piece
with other notes embroidered above and below it!

How the deep bass notes make us feel.
Not just one tune, several
voices within bass or treble clefs.
Like choirs I have sung with.

New Italian words: *morendo*, *semplice* provide direction.
Bring back a feeling of learning secret codes, paths to magic
as when I was a child. A language I can now keep.
That can't be taken away.