BARRBARA ADAMS
THREE-QUARTERS PIANO

My piano went missing
in the middle of a war
moving from New York to LA
and back to New York.

One day a strange piano appeared
in our dingy NY flat,
carried up one flight of stairs
by two hairy men
my mother tipped with a ten.

I fingered the keyboard,
the chromatic scale
down on the left, up on the right—
until my hands struck wood
with a dull thud—

An octave had been amputated
on either end
like half of each arm—
but the remaining keys were intact.

I opened my battered cardboard box
to J.S. Bach,
fingering easy arpeggios
from the Prelude in C,
then tried Chopin's Minute Waltz,
trilling in five flats for fifteen minutes.
But Beethoven’s Sonata in C minor—
the *Pathétique*—
its manic highs and dark lows
were unforgiving, wouldn’t fit in.

Until the war ended,
I played scraps and bits—
Mother at the doctor’s
Father with another wife
Sister on the floor, sucking her thumb—

Playing for myself
what I knew by heart.