

## Halvard Johnson

### Etudes

This is a piece I play  
using the black keys only.  
On the sidewalk across  
the street, someone has collapsed.  
No one rushes up in concern.  
Why should they? Why should they?  
Nobody's business but his own.

Here is the song of the bomber  
with clusters of notes  
struck by my fist.  
It is named after a smouldering  
village, which none of us  
knew the name of, even then.  
My hand is bashing away at the keys.

Less than ever  
do I understand you. A trill  
in the bass, third and fourth fingers.  
I don't even know where  
you come from.  
The trill broadens to a tremolo.  
I stare at you, wide-eyed in amazement.

Here my left hand crosses  
my right hand to pick out several  
tones at the very top of my range.

I think of it as swallows,  
darting, looping high against  
a darkening sky. Or bats  
swooping out of the attic at nightfall.

Chords. Great majestic chords  
moving out across  
a landscape, like a column  
of tanks. When broken,  
there is a rippling effect,  
a movement like that of water  
moving swiftly over abandoned bones.

—from *Winter Journey*  
St. Paul: New Rivers Press, 1979