

**David Cashman**

**The Piece**

came to be his favorite in the repertoire, not because it was an audience favorite that could be counted on night after night to elicit waves of warm applause — and thus that sought-after feeling of connection, of knowing on both sides and across. In point of fact, he had come, over the years, to regard that feeling as inauthentic, as mostly an illusion. Much better the feeling he got from the McGrath, now his signature piece, the piece that had enabled critics to place him in a niche, a small and rather peripheral box, respected, yes, but not to everyone's taste. The piece was supremely difficult, of that there could be no doubt, and it had taken him years of work to acquire the facility it required. Performing it was now a celebration of a mastery he had given a lifetime to attain, a celebration, too, of the joy arising from the singular and profound connection he felt with the small cadre of listeners who came across the large divide. He loved the playing of it; he loved that he *could* play it; and in the hours between the rehearsals, the equally necessary performances, he loved contemplating a mystery he would never completely solve — or, better, name: what was the force that had connected him to the piece before he could hear its beauty, what was the force that had affixed its mastery to the progress of his soul, that had given him a proper life — what beauty, what love, was *that*?

### **A Breakthrough, The Easement**

You come through by sleepwalking, at the very least  
by closing your eyes. The portal has spiraled open  
like an aperture and snapped shut behind, sealing  
your happy capture. This is your brief removal  
to an Edenic country. The path by which you fashioned  
your approach — the interminable hours  
of practice — is not forgotten exactly, but somehow  
collected within, implicit now, a part of your  
capacity for going forward, an aspect of your new repertoire.  
Fingers and brain speak one language in unison,  
and you go on playing in this blessed respite  
before the next frontier of consternation — and resolution.  
You go on playing, playing.

**Indian Summer**

One week after the first hard frost:  
a day warm and windless  
— and the ginkgo, almost it seems,  
mints its coins in a single sheet,  
a flattened span, round and  
golden as the sun itself,  
fallen on the still-green grass.