

Kevin McNeilly

Tuner

Swaddled in wool tweeds, you turned out to be
your own worst prototype: well-known stranger,
public recluse, craving the solitude
of a dissolve. Into celebrity's cause,
you retired. Faders and rheostats
became the felted keys for your gloved touch,
an orchestra of levels. You never once
spoiled, by fingerprints or the careless flick
of an X-acto, the half-inch ribbons
of ferrous oxide you sliced, and scotch-taped,
and re-spliced; your fudged, unmistakable
signature traced instead its coarse mutter
at the threshold of audibility,
more pressured air than sound, more sound than sense.

Style narrowed to a stall within the line,
the way your flexed pinky might have hovered,
barely poised on one note. Digital smirch,
you disappeared into your audience,
itchy to be remembered as the one
the world forgot. Deliberately you watched
us watch your self-made mirage decompose
into the deft indulgence of technique,
suckered by virtuosity. You bent
an ear to the applauded noise people
called music, and winnowed, assuming what
one mistook for rhapsody, another
could fix, though unwilling to pass yourself
off as original – only unique,

attuned. Jealous of nothing but silence,
you sought by stretching time across a warp
of wound brass wire, circuit boards, humming tubes,
not to collaborate or compromise

but to tease from each perfect pitch the pulse
of its internal dissonance, concord
as throbbled argument. Impersonating
show-offs for the sake of counterpoint, you
distilled a voice in its own caesura.
(Theodore Slutz, part-time post-serial
sound poet and hip critic, bluntly: *So
you want to write a fugue?* Take your best shot.

Go for the beat, man. I mean, live it up.)
Knuckled down in a motel room somewhere
north of Wawa, you penciled over scores,
prepared broadcasts, editorialized.
Your life emerged on mothwings, overheard
in mock recitals of intimacy,
your name a synonym for cold talent.