THE OLD MAN PLAYED

Ingrid Anderson

[Assignment: The assignment is the same as for "The Organ."]

(1) It was a typical Saturday afternoon as I walked into the Union. The first thing I was drawn in by when I stepped into the lobby, after being outside in the gloom of the afternoon, was cheerful music coming from a piano. The sound took me down two flights of stairs to "Ye Olde Grail." I peered around the corner and saw on a small platform an old man playing the familiar song, "The Entertainer." I was intrigued by this man and how well he played. I sat down to listen; he seemed to brighten the place up. Everyone seemed to forget the dark, cloudy, wet day that lay outside. This man seemed so content and comfortable in this casual setting. He showed his emotions not in his facial expressions, but through his bodily movements while sitting on the piano bench, and the way he played each tune from memory.

(2) He was very old, his face was long and droopy, but he had a rosy color that seemed to add to the calm, free flowing attitude of the music. His nose was long, thin, and came to a point at the end. His eyes were crystal clear and sparkled as he went right along playing his tunes. I could sense that this man loved music. His lips were red and puffy, but they were barely visible through the mass of snow white hair that covered his face. His ears were big, long and clearly visible because his long hair was pulled behind them. His hair was long and white in color with a few gray streaks. The hair was all one length, tangled and very coarse. If I was to touch it, it would feel like a horse's mane and tail. Added to his long hair he had a beard which was also long, bushy and untrimmed. The length and whiteness of his hair reminded me of a wise man who could tell me many stories. His upper body was covered with a worn, tattered coat made out of leather. Underneath the coat, he wore a mustard colored sweater that was all stretched out and had little fuzzies of wool all over it. There were even some small holes that moths had made while the sweater was in storage. The bulk of clothes made his body less defined, but I could tell he was big and stocky. His legs were barely visible because they were hidden underneath the piano. Still I noticed that he wore big baggy pants tucked in large brown army boots that were on their last mile.

(3) The way he played the music brought my attention to his hands. They were big and strong yet delicate and graceful as they hit the keys. To touch his hands would be like feeling sandpaper. I could tell he had done hard manual labor. The beat of the music followed right along with his body movements. Back and forth, up and down, he
added a splash of eagerness to the old, traditional songs. The crowd seemed to accept the music with some interest. There was a low hum of talk during the playing and some audience members even requested tunes. There was respect for this man; the people looked beyond his dress and outward appearance and recognized talent. This piano player seemed so content with life. He did not look like a man who found it easy to express himself in speech, but he revealed himself in melody.

(4) This man with simple, plain and worn apparel illuminated "Ye Olde Grail" every Saturday and Sunday afternoon. His music brought smiles to the faces of V.U. students and brightened the atmosphere of the afternoon. As we sat around, listening to the old man bring life to the piano with his simple songs, it allowed us to forget the gloomy dreary day that awaited us outside the Union doors.