

Doris' Piano



Oh no, not again! groaned Doris. It seemed like every time she played Manuel de Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance" these days, the darned piano burst into flames! Trying to ignore the fire, she bowed to the audience, but her left hand brushed against the piano. *Yeom!*, it was hot, she thought, as she recoiled and accidentally knocked over the piano bench. An annoying whine from the theater's smoke detector interrupted the applause, prompting several spectators to look around in apprehension. Doris worried that they might leave before she got to the last piece on her recital, and a weird clause in her performance contract stipulated that "payment for services rendered is contingent on audience members staying to the *very* last note." She righted the bench, sat down, cracked her knuckles, and began her final piece, Jerome Kern's "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." But the keys were hot and getting hotter, and she found she had to play it a lot more staccato than normal, which seriously compromised the tune's usually soothing quality. Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted several people in the theater stand up and put on their coats. She upped the tempo, turning the ballad into a quickstep. With corresponding speed, the fire jumped from the piano to the stage and from the stage to the orchestra. Two women shrieked in parallel fifths, their palpable fear seeming to fan the flames. The fire moved quickly, engulfing the rest of the downstairs and heading for the balcony. By now, the black keys were smoking and too hot to touch – a real problem for a piece rooted in B major. So Doris modulated up a half-step, then stepped on the piano's middle pedal: the accelerator. The resulting *prestissimo* got the piece to the final chord just before the ceiling collapsed – and, presumably, before anyone made it out of the theater. Her part of the contract satisfied, Doris staggered off-stage, with smoke not only in her eyes but also in her nose and throat. Next time, she vowed, she'd stick to Handel's "Water Music."