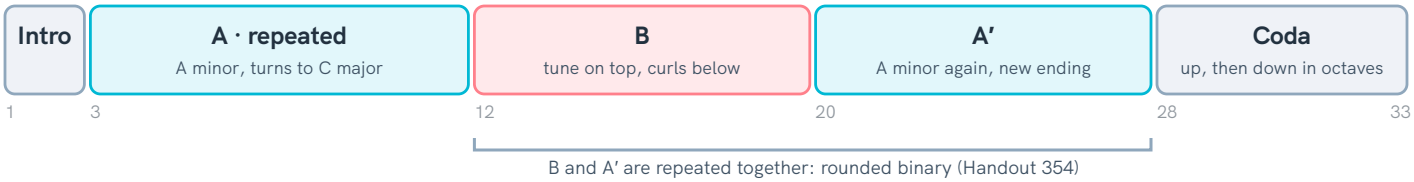
Inside Burgmüller's *Arabesque*

Friedrich Burgmüller, *L'Arabesque*, 25 Easy and Progressive Studies, Op. 100 No. 2 — quick fingers, light hands
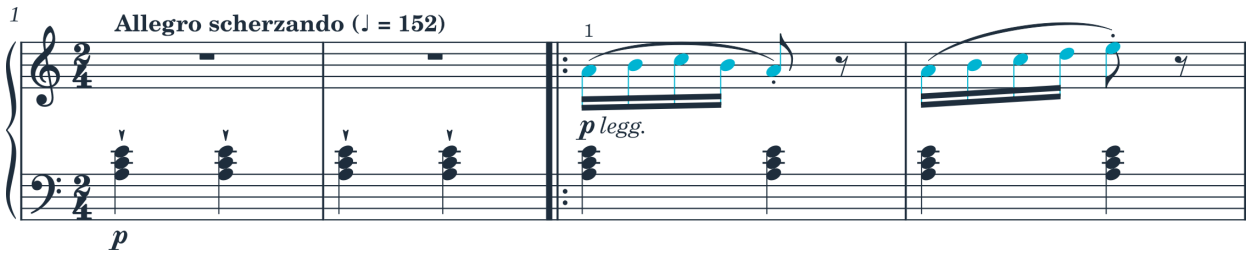
Friedrich Burgmüller (1806–1874) grew up in Germany and spent most of his life in Paris as a popular piano teacher. His *25 Études faciles et progressives*, Op. 100, came out in Paris around 1851, "composed and fingered for small hands". Every study has a picture-title, and that is why pianists still love them: they are exercises that sound like real pieces (No. 15, the *Ballade*: Handout 382). An **arabesque** is a curling, twisting ornament, like the patterns carved on old buildings. Here the curl is a quick group of sixteenth notes.

THE FORM · A FRAME OF CHORDS, A CURL IN EACH HAND



Allegro scherzando means fast and playful (the metronome mark is a quarter note = 152). Each A section starts in **A minor**. The B section keeps the key but swaps the jobs of the hands: a long-note tune on top, the curls underneath.

A · CHORDS BELOW, THE CURL ON TOP



Bars 1–4 with the fingering of the first edition (Paris, 1851). The curl in **cyan**.
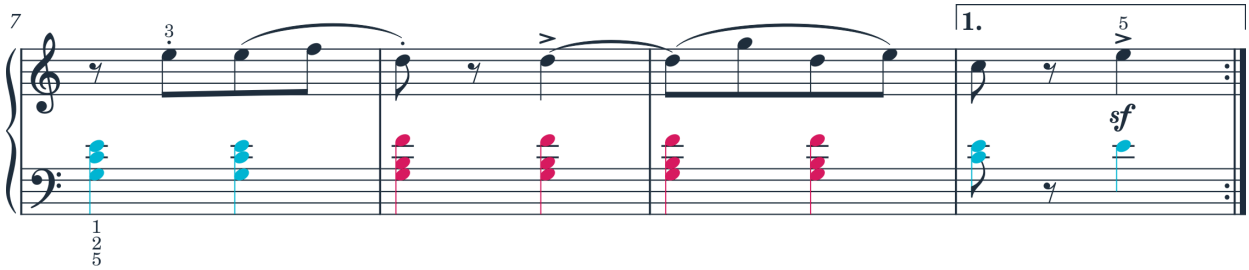
Left hand: short and light

The left hand starts alone with **staccato** chords, A–C–E, two per bar (the edition prints the dots as small wedges). They set the speed and the mood: crisp, quiet (*p*), never heavy; bounce them from the wrist. From bar 3 on they carry no staccato marks but keep the beat: light and even.

Right hand: one curl, one motion

Each curl is four slurred **sixteenths** and a **staccato** eighth. Play it as one gesture: drop into the first note, roll through the fingers (1–2–3–2–1 in bar 3, 1–2–3–4–5 in bar 4; the edition writes the 1), and lift the hand off the eighth, like the drop-lift slur of Handout 62. *Legg.* (leggiero) means lightly.
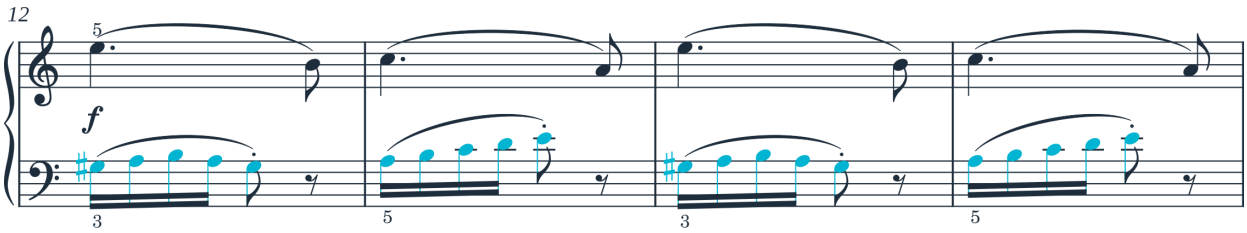
A BRIGHT TURN TO C MAJOR



In bars 7–10 the left hand changes chords: **C over G** (a cadential 6/4, Handout 383), then **G–B–F** (G7, with its D in the right hand), then **C–E**. That is V7–I in **C major**, the relative major of A minor (Handouts 212 and 23): for a moment the music turns bright. Watch the **accent** (>) on the tied D in bar 8 and the ***sf*** on the high E in bar 10: lean into them, then get light again at once.

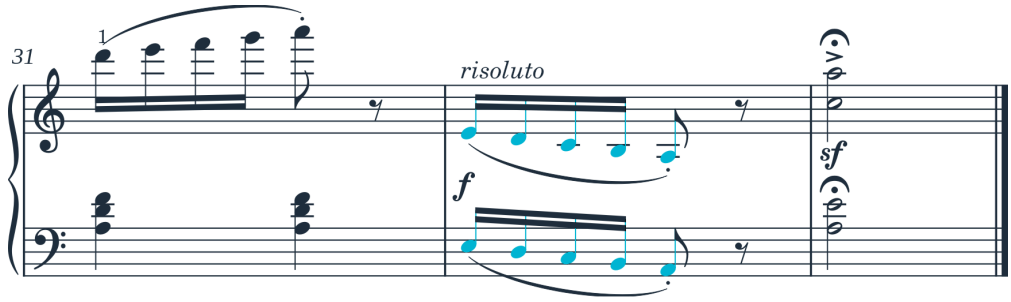
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B · THE CURL MOVES TO THE LEFT HAND



Now the right hand sings long notes, *forte*, E–B, C–A, and the **curl** is in the left hand (a motif changing hands, Handout 355), with the same rhythm and the same slur-then-staccato shape. The left hand has to be just as light and quick as the right was, and the tune must stay on top. Bars 18–19 get quieter and slow down (*dimin. e poco rall.*), and the A section returns *In Tempo.* (in time, the same as *a tempo*).

THE CODA · UP, THEN DOWN IN OCTAVES



In bar 31 the last curl climbs to a high A. Then, *forte* and *risoluto* (determined), both hands run down **E–D–C–B–A** an octave apart (one line: a monophonic texture, Handout 356), the same notes in each hand, and the piece ends on a held A-minor chord with a **fermata**. Practice that run hands together slowly, until the two hands sound like one.

PRACTICE RECIPE

1. **Left hand alone first.** Play the chord frame of bars 1–11 by itself: short in bars 1–2, where the edition marks it, then light and even. Silently move to each new chord shape before you play it.
2. **Curls in slow motion.** Play each curl slowly with the drop-lift motion. Then try it as a quick group that **stops** on the eighth note, and wait. Fast fingers, calm hand. Fingering practice from bars 5–6: Exercise 63.
3. **Hands together slowly**, with the metronome (Handout 55). Raise it a few clicks at a time toward a quarter note = 152, only when every curl is even.
4. **Swap the jobs.** In bars 12–17 practice the left-hand curls alone, then add the right-hand tune, *forte* and singing over them.
5. **Add the accents and dynamics last**: *p* at the start, the bar-8 accent, the *sf*, and the *f risoluto* octaves in bar 32.

TRY IT Play bars 3–4 with the right hand, then bars 12–13 with the left. Can you make the left-hand curls sound exactly like the right-hand ones: same speed, same lift at the end?

LISTEN
Scan to hear the whole piece and the bars on this sheet
tissimo.co/worksheets/burgmuller-arabesque
Full sheet in our sheet music library:
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