Inside Burgmüller's *Ballade*

Friedrich Burgmüller, *Ballade*, 25 Easy and Progressive Studies, Op. 100 No. 15 — a story in C minor

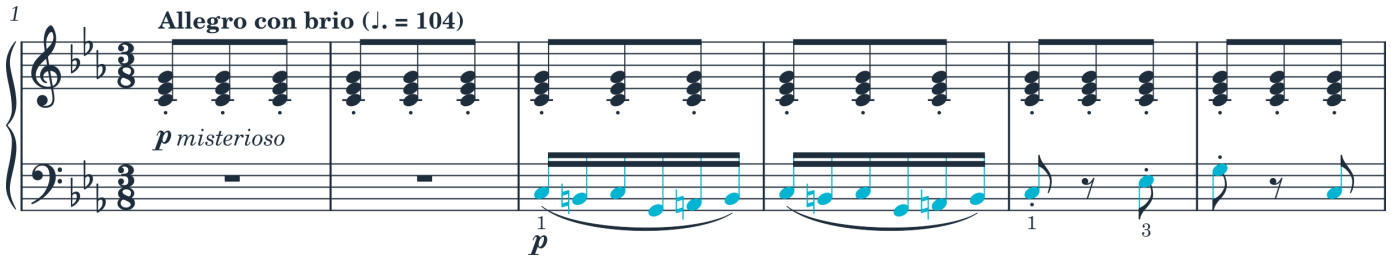
Friedrich Burgmüller (1806–1874) published his *25 Études faciles et progressives*, Op. 100, in Paris around 1851 (Handout 343 tells his story). No. 15 is the **Ballade**. A ballad is a song that tells a story, and a ballade is a piece that tells one without words. This one starts quiet and mysterious (*misterioso*), bursts out loud, sings a sunny song in the middle, and then tells its dark story again. *Allegro con brio* means fast and lively: a dotted quarter = 104 in the first edition, so you feel **one beat in each bar** of 3/8.

THE FORM · DARK, BRIGHT, DARK AGAIN

A · C minor	B · C major	A · C minor	Coda
the tune in the left hand	a song on top · 31–46 repeated	bars 1–30 again, almost note for note	both hands
1	31	57	87 96

The map is A B A, a **ternary form** (Handouts 233 and 354), with a short coda to finish. Both A sections are in **C minor**; B is in **C major**. The home note C stays the same and only the color changes: **parallel keys** (Handout 74). The first A ends on a G chord, the dominant (V), and waits under a fermata in bar 30, leaning into B.

A · THE TUNE IS IN THE LEFT HAND



Bars 1–6 with the first edition's fingering. **Cyan**: the left hand's tune.

Right hand: the heartbeat

Three soft **staccato** chords in every bar, mostly C–E♭–G, all the way to bar 18. They set the speed and the mood, *p misterioso*. Keep them short, light and even, and bounce them from the wrist.

Left hand: the storyteller

The tune starts in bar 3, low in the bass: a quick slurred figure, C–B–C–G–A–B, then C–E♭–G–C, short. Its B and A are natural, as in the melodic minor (Handout 25), so the figure climbs to C. As in *The Happy Farmer* (Handout 347), the tune must sound louder than the chords.

BARS 7–10 · A SUDDEN SHIVER



In bar 7 the left hand jumps up to A♮ and holds it, marked *sf*: a sudden accent. In bar 8 the right hand's G slips down to F♯. Stack the four notes in thirds, F♯–A–C–E♭, and each one is a minor third above the one below: a **diminished seventh chord** (Handout 210), here with A in the bass. It is the classic sound of suspense. Bars 9–10 say it again, then the tune starts over.

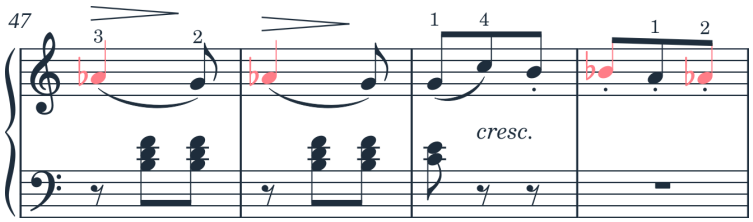
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B · A SONG IN C MAJOR



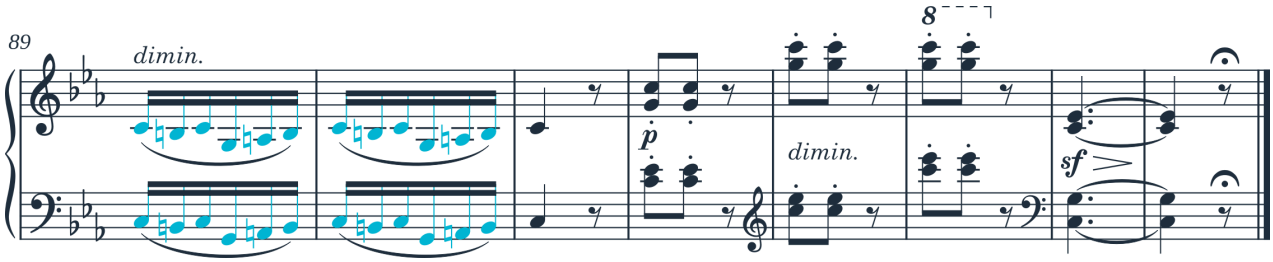
After the double bar the flats disappear: C major, *p dolce* (sweetly). Now the hands swap jobs. The right hand sings a **legato** tune in long dotted quarters, **G–C–B–G**, under one slur, and the left hand plays soft chords off the beat: rest, chord, chord.

BARS 47–56 · C MINOR'S SHADOW



A♭ does not belong to C major; it comes from C minor. Each A♭ falls to G under a slur, like a sigh: lean on the first note, lift off the second (Handout 62). In bar 50 the line slides down B♭–A–A♭ and the sighs start again. In bars 53–56 both hands walk A♭–F–D–G, *dimin.*, straight back into C minor.

THE CODA · BOTH HANDS TELL THE TUNE



After the second A, the tune comes back in **both hands**, an octave apart: *f* in bars 87–88, then *dimin.* (bars 89–90, above). Three pairs of soft chords jump up the keyboard, an octave higher each bar (under the *8* sign, play one more octave up). One last *sf* chord, low in both hands, ends the story.

PRACTICE RECIPE

1. **Right hand alone.** Play the chords of bars 1–18 short and light from the wrist. Change smoothly to the F♯ chords in bars 8, 10, 16 and 18, and back.
2. **Left hand alone.** Learn the slurred figure slowly with the printed fingering (1 on the first C), then the short C–E♭–G–C. Hold every A♮ through its tie.
3. **Hands together, slowly,** with the metronome (Handout 55). The tune must sound louder than the chords. Raise the speed toward a dotted quarter = 104 only when it stays even.
4. **The B section:** right hand legato, each dotted quarter held its full length; left-hand chords soft and after the beat. Then the sighs of bars 47–52: lean, then lift.
5. **Tell the whole story:** the *cresc.* of bars 20–23 to the *f* of bar 24, the rests counted exactly, the fermata in bar 30, and the coda from *f* down to the last *sf*.

TRY IT Play bars 3–6 twice: once with the chords as loud as the tune, once with the tune clearly louder than the chords. Which one sounds like someone telling a story?

LISTEN
Scan to hear these bars and the whole Ballade
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