Inside Schumann's *The Wild Rider*

Robert Schumann, *Wilder Reiter*, Op. 68 No. 8, from the *Album for the Young* (1848) — one tune, two hands

Robert Schumann (1810–1856) wrote the *Album for the Young* in 1848 for his three daughters. It began as a birthday present for the eldest, Marie, who turned seven that year, and grew into 43 short pieces, from very easy to quite hard. Every piece is a little picture with a title: a soldiers' march, a hunting song, a poor orphan child. For No. 8, picture a child galloping around the room on a hobby horse, full speed and full of bumps.

THE FORM · TERNARY, A B A

A · repeated	B	A
A minor · tune in the right hand	F major · tune in the left hand	A minor again, note for note
1 – 8	9 – 16	17 – 24

the same gallop, moved down a tenth and handed to the left hand

Three 8-bar sections: **A**, a contrasting **B**, then **A** again. This is **ternary form** (Handouts 233 and 354). The contrast is not a new tune but a new key, **F major**, and a new hand. Bars 17–24 repeat bars 1–8 exactly (without the repeat).

A · THE TUNE IN THE RIGHT HAND



Pickup and bars 1–4. The tune in **cyan**.

A gallop up the A-minor chord

Bar 1 is all **A-minor chord**: A–E–A, C–A–C. In 6/8 time the six eighths fall into two groups of three, **ONE**-two-three **FOUR**-five-six, and that lilt is the horse's gallop. In bar 3 a **G♯** appears: the raised leading tone of A minor (Handout 25), pulling hard back to A.

Bumps: staccato and *sf*

Almost every note has a **staccato** dot: short and bouncy. The exceptions are the slurred pairs at the start of bars 2 and 3, marked ***sf*** (*sforzando*, a sudden strong accent): lean into the first note, let the second one go softly (Handout 62). Under it all, the left hand taps chords on the beats, plus one on the eighth just before beat 2 in bars 2–4.

UNDER THE TUNE · ONLY THREE CHORDS



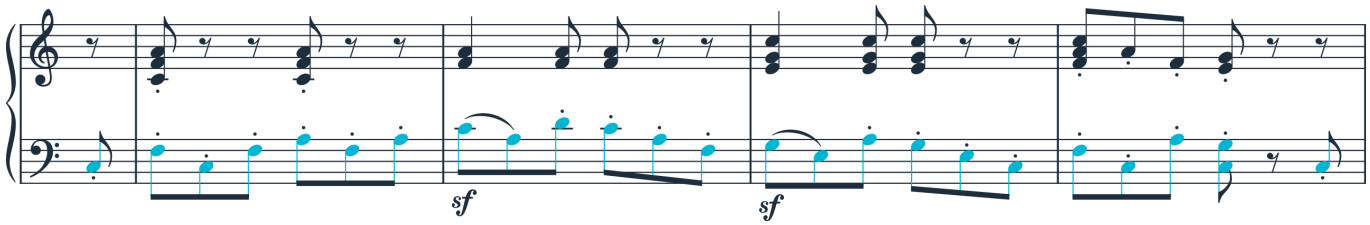
The left hand of bars 1–4 uses just three chords of A minor (Handout 24): **i** = A minor, **iv** = D minor and **V** = E major, the chord with the G♯. In bars 2 and 3 the bottom note stays put while the chord above it changes (two pedal 6/4s, Handout 383), so the hand hardly moves. Block each chord silently before you play the bar.

LISTEN
Scan to hear the whole piece and the bars on this sheet
tissimo.co/worksheets/schumann-wild-rider

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B · THE LEFT HAND TAKES THE REINS

Same tune, new key, other hand



Pickup and bars 9–12. The tune, now in the left hand, in **cyan**.

Compare this with page 1. The left hand plays **the same tune, note for note in shape**, but a tenth lower (an octave plus a third) and in **F major**: A–E–A–C becomes F–C–F–A. Even the slurred *sf* pairs come back, now in the left hand. The right hand swaps jobs too and plays the chords. The G♯ is gone (it belonged to A minor), so the B section sounds brighter and bolder, the rider in the open field.

Bar 16 · the way back

The B section ends on an F chord with a double bar, and one lonely staccato **E** in the right hand, marked *mf*, leads straight back into the tune. It is the same pickup that started the piece: give it a clear little push.

Bars 23–24 · the rider pulls up

The last bars end **V** to **i**, then stop on a rest. Play the last chord short, exactly in time: no slowing down.



PRACTICE RECIPE

1. **Each hand alone, staccato from the wrist.** Let the hand bounce lightly off the keys, like a ball, instead of pressing each note down. Keep the fingers close to the keys.
2. **Find the pattern under the hand.** In bar 1 the right hand plays only E, A and C; try thumb on E, 3 on A and 5 on C (a suggestion: your teacher may prefer another). The left hand in bars 9–10 mirrors it: 5 on C, 3 on F, thumb on A.
3. **Practice the *sf* pairs as "drop-lift."** Drop the arm into the first note, lift off the second. Then the very next note is staccato again.
4. **Hands together, slowly,** one section at a time. In A the right hand is louder; in B **the left hand sings out** and the right-hand chords stay light. Listen that the tune is always on top of the sound, even when it is underneath on the keyboard.
5. **Feel two beats per bar,** not six (count its tune in Exercise 84, line I). Speed up only when every staccato is still crisp: a wild rider, but one who stays on the horse.

TRY IT Play bar 1 with the right hand, then bar 9 with the left. Hear how they are the same gallop? Now play the whole A section with the tune **forte** and the chords **piano**, then the B section the other way round.

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