
Burgmüller
Music Storybook
25 Tales Inspired by “25 Études”
Written by Genta Takaku
Supervised by Nanako Sugiura
Translated by Keiko Mitsuda

The Candid

A girl called Emily was on vacation and visited Paris with her family.

Deep inside of her heart, however, she was very much pressed by the idea that she had to practice the piano all the time.

“It is really a hard work. I will have to resume it as soon as I get home”

Lost in thought, Emily strayed into a back alley.

Carriages were rolling away, gas lamps were on, buildings looked old-fashioned—she felt as if she was thrown into Paris in the nineteenth century.

Wandering around, she came across a quaint café with a piano placed inside.

The café attracted her and got her step inside. A gentleman with a distinguished beard fixed her attention. Emily met his gaze.

Feeling relaxed for some reason, she confided in him.

" To me, practicing the piano is such a hard work. I do not think I like it.”

The gentleman smiled warmly and replied, "Thank you for sharing how you feel about your piano practice so openly. Your candid attitude is important as well when you play the piano."

Then, he turned to the piano and began playing a gentle melody.

Having finished the music, he wrote down the piece and handed it to Emily.

Getting out of the café, she suddenly found herself back on a bustling street with full of modern automobiles.

At a later time, Emily got to know that the piece the gentleman had given her was “The Candid”, an piano étude composed by Burgmüller.

He had been Mr. Burgmüller himself!

In the nineteenth century, the music education was a part of upbringing among the bourgeois society. The choice of C major, with its clear scales and harmonies, may tell how important it is to pay attention to what teachers say in a proper manner. The story portrays a transcendent encounter beyond time and space between Burgmüller and the “sincere heart” of a child living today.

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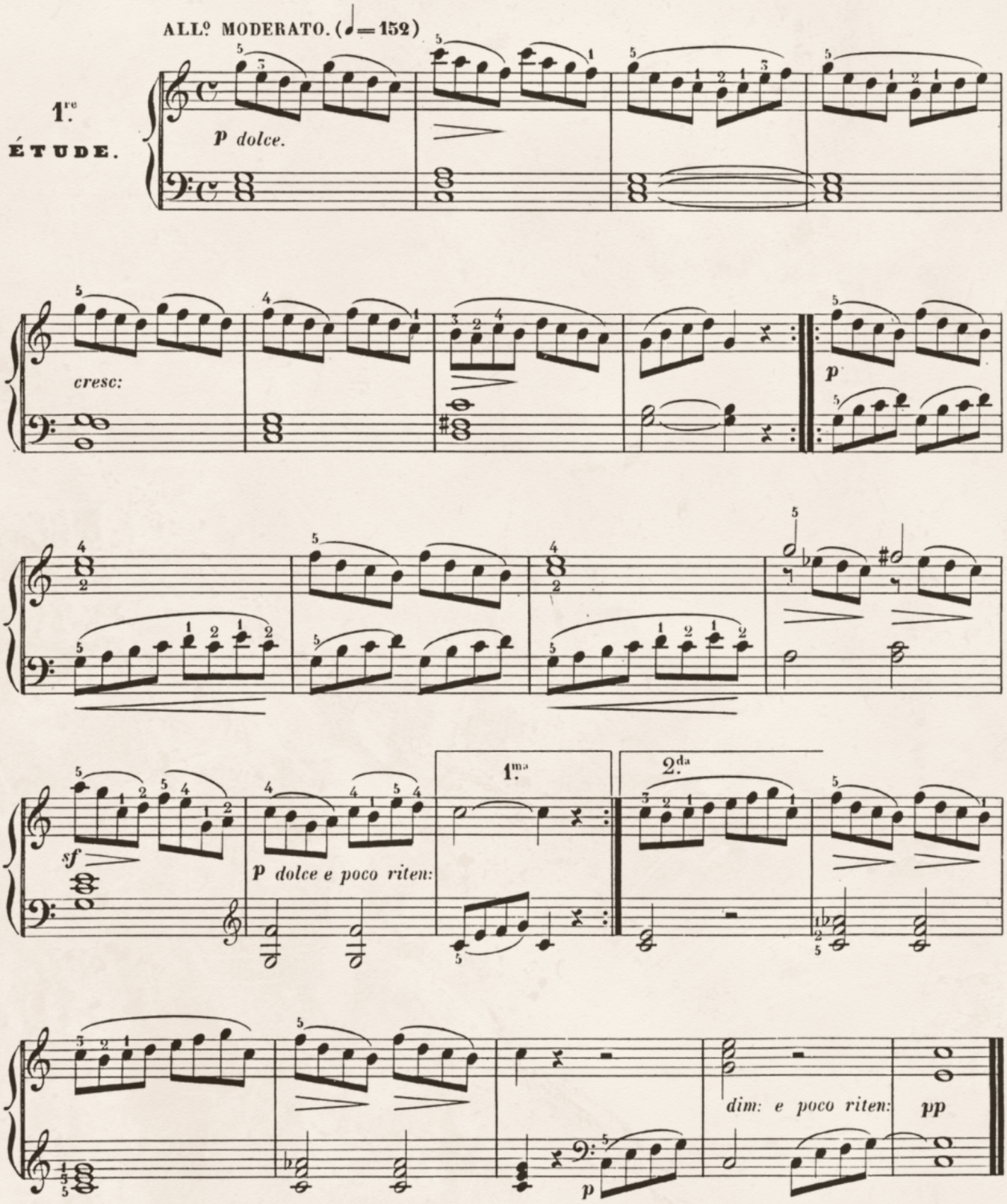
LA CANDEUR.

1re ÉTUDE.

ALLo MODERATO. (♩= 152)



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What kind of person was Burgmüller ?

Hold on! Is Burgmüller a name of person?

When I was a child, I imagined that “Burgmüller” was a name of piano textbook. In Japan, almost all the piano students practice the 25 Études. Unlike Bach or Mozart, however, Burgmüller is not well recognized as composer, which may have misled many people including myself. Even today, we hardly ever hear his name outside of the Études.

Nevertheless, Burgmüller’s pieces are incredibly popular in Japan. You are bound to hear more than one of his works at any piano recital or competition. His études have been cherished as a classic teaching tool for over years. Arabesque, La chevaleresque, Sincerity—even small children can hum the melodies the moment they hear the names.

Why are they loved so much? The answer is quite simple: unlike most of other exercise pieces, his études are very musical. They offer beautiful melodies, imaginative titles, and rhythms that are genuinely fun to play. They do not just force players to train fingers. They invite players to express feeling. That is the reason for teachers to trust his music to help children step into true musical expression. His legacy has quietly endured across generations in this way.

Still, a question remains. Who was Burgmüller?

In spite of a superstar in the piano curriculum, his life is not so visible. Let’s take a journey into his story and discover the person behind the music.

Burgmüller in Germany

Burgmüller—his full name was Friedrich Burgmüller—was born in Regensburg, Germany, in 1806. His father, August, worked as music director in a theater. When he was young, he had shared stages with a rising star named Beethoven in Bonn. Back then, Beethoven was just eighteen years old. August could personally offer his advice to Beethoven.

Growing up in such a musical family, Friedrich was led to the piano and composition in a natural manner. His younger brother, Norbert, also showed great promise as a composer. Mendelssohn and as well as Schumann praised his works. Norbert was short-lived, however. He passed away at the age of twenty-six. Friedrich made every effort to publish what Norbert created and to share them with the world. Music was always in the heart of Friedrich's family, who indirectly connected him to great composers in Europe in those days.

A Beloved Teacher in Paris

In his middle twenties, Friedrich moved to Paris, which was the greatest city in the world in the field of music at that time. Chopin, Liszt, Thalberg—the most dazzling pianists of the age were all there, competing one another and performing at the highest level.

Amid such brilliance, Burgmüller found his own path—a gifted teacher—and became very popular. He wrote pieces that made piano both fun and approachable for all generation one after another. In elegant salons, where nobles and wealthy families held private concerts, he would perform charming sketches that lit up the room.

In 1838, he published a piece titled Fantastical Dreams, dedicated to none other than Liszt himself. This is somewhat a brilliant and dreamy piece, inspired by the style of Liszt, who was renowned for his virtuosity. Schumann also took notice and wrote about the piece in a review, praising it as "a fine work." Burgmüller was not only a beloved teacher but also a skilled composer who breathed the same rarefied air as the musical giants of his time.

A Composer for the Ballet

He had another, rather surprising side. Burgmüller composed appendix to the ballet Giselle, which was performed at the Paris Opera. One of his pieces, the Peasant Pas de Deux, became a beloved part of the production and is still danced today whenever Giselle is staged. That success led to something even greater. In 1843, he unveiled his own original ballet, La Péri—a magical tale of love between a young man and a fairy. It was a smash hit. Burgmüller suddenly became a successful baller composer. The sense of rhythm he developed for dance, along with his gift for writing clear, vivid melodies, would shine through in his études later.

And Then Came the 25 Études

In 1851, drawing out of all he had learned, Burgmüller published what would become that most enduring work: the 25 Études, Op.100. Paris in the 1850s was entering a golden age of home piano education, and the market for teaching materials was booming. Soon after the release, the Études were published in German and English as well, and continued to gain popularity year after year.

From La candeur, the very first piece, to La chevaleresque, the final one, the 25 short works are as if a miniature storybook.

– Short but unforgettable melodies

– Titles which easily call up vivid scenes and match well with rich musical expression

– The appropriate degree of difficulty that offers high performance effect and good sense of accomplishment as well

These small pieces captured the hearts of children and fitted the goals of teachers perfectly. That is why they have remained long-time seller. In Japan, especially, the Études spread rapidly after the Second World War, becoming standard pieces at recitals and a rite of passage for nearly all who have ever studied piano.

In the End

Burgmüller passed away in Paris in 1874, at the age of sixty-eight. His name never became a major entry in the history books of music, yet his works lived on—cherished as teaching pieces by children around the globe.

Now, if we are asked, “Who was Burgmüller?” we can tell as follows:

He was a musician born in Germany and flourished in Paris. He wrote excellent pieces for ballet and salon concerts and also poured his energy into piano education. Through his 25 Études, he continues to share the joy of music with children all over the world.

Behind those teaching pieces lies the real life of a composer—along with the rich culture of the nineteenth century in Paris. Each short étude we play today carries that history within it. They are not just exercises, but “little works of art.”

Considering Burgmüller not just “the textbook man” but also a living artist from a vibrant musical world could help children discover how deep and full of wonder music truly is.



Title	Key	Time Signature	Tempo Marking	Teaching Points / Lesson Focus
The Candid	C major	4/4	Allegro Moderato (Moderately fast)	Practice a beautiful legato; feel the phrasing of the melody. Play with awareness of harmonic function.
Arabesque	A minor	2/4	Allegro scherzando (Fast and playfully)	Play the sixteenth-notes evenly. Take each figure as a different pattern of arabesque.
Pastoral	G major	6/8	Andantino (Slightly faster than andante)	A pastoral atmosphere and tempo; gentle tone and phrasing. Cradle-like rhythmic motion that characterizes the pastoral music.
Little Gathering	C major	4/4	Allegro non troppo (Fast, but not too fast)	Dialogue between the two hands; successive motion in thirds and sixths.
Innocence	F major	3/4	Moderato (Moderate tempo)	Play the sixteenth-note scale passages legato.
Progress	C major	4/4	Allegro (Fast)	Align the parallel motion between the two hands. Pay attention to the difference between the stepwise motion and the skipwise one.
The Limpid Stream	G major	4/4	Allegro vivace (Fast and lively)	Differentiate the three voices; the inner voice symbolizes flow. Shape broad phrasing in the soprano line.
Grace	F major	3/4	Moderato (Moderate tempo)	Play each figure of thirty-second notes lightly and fluently.
The Hunt	C major	6/8	Allegro vivace (Fast and lively)	Vitality in rhythm; full resonance of horn-like fifths. Experience the character piece through playing a miniature scene.
Tender Flower	D major	4/4	Moderato (Moderate tempo)	Play arpeggiated melodies smoothly with a soft tone. Perceive the nuances among stepwise motion, thirds, and octaves.
The Wagtail	C major	2/4	Allegretto (Slightly fast)	Play chord inversions and repeated notes lightly.
Farewell	A minor	4/4	Allegro molto agitato (Fast and very agitated)	Legato in triplets; empathize with the mood of farewell.
Consolation	C major	4/4	Allegro moderato (Moderately fast)	Differentiate two voices within one hand. Harmonize parallel melodies between the two hands.

Title	Key	Time Signature	Tempo Marking	Teaching Points / Lesson Focus
Stilienne	G major	3/4	Mouvement de valse (In the character of a waltz)	A rhythmic vitality of dance through a folk dance. Expression of yodeling; measures 23–24 and 27–28 depict the yodel.
Ballad	C minor	3/8	Allegro con brio (Fast, with spirit)	Narrative and dramatic qualities; understanding of musical expression imbued with literary symbolism.
Sweet Lament	G minor	4/4	Allegro moderato (Moderately fast)	Play smoothly the sixteenth notes in the left hand. Convey sorrow in the descending melodic lines in the right hand.
Chatter	F major	3/8	Allegretto (Slightly fast)	Articulate each note in the repeated unison clearly. Bring alive the rhythmic character of notes in the left hand.
Anxiety	E minor	2/4	Allegro agitato (Fast and agitated)	Concentrate to perform the perpetuum mobile. Play notes crisply and precisely with the left hand.
Ave Maria	A major	3/4	Andantino (Slightly faster than andante)	Four-part texture: consider the balance of a choral sonority. Pedaling that evokes the resonance of a church can be effective.
Tarantella	D minor	6/8	Allegro vivo (Fast and lively)	The energetic speed that characterize the tarantella dance.
The Harmony of the Angels	G major	4/4	Allegro moderato (Moderately fast)	Make a sound of seamless melody by passing a flow of notes between the two hands. Resonance as if being in a church, which includes a quotation from Schubert's "Ave Maria."
Barcarolle	A♭ major	6/8	Andantino quasi Allegretto (Andantino, almost like an Allegretto)	A sense of rhythmic sway as a boat rolls. Forward momentum in the melody; imaginative tone color evoking the scene.
Return	E♭ major	6/8	Molto agitato quasi presto (Very agitated, almost at presto speed)	Play the repeated notes in the left hand as a carriage gallops off at full speed.
The Swallow	G major	4/4	Allegro non troppo (Fast, but not too fast)	Smooth hand-crossing, as the left hand crosses over the right one.
The Knightly	C major	4/4	Allegro marziale (Fast and march-like)	A dignified, march-like rhythmic expression. Clear sense of strong and weak beats; brilliant rendering of the scales.

Genta Takaku (Pen Name: Tetsuto Yamanaka)

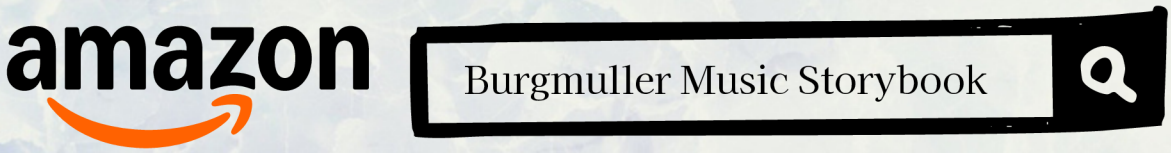
Producer and Director of the music label Vacances Musicales, as well as a regional music coordinator. He has produced numerous albums and concerts under the label and has been involved in the planning and production of various music projects, including the Yamada Kōsaku Piano Music Project (2022), the Left-Hand All-Bach Concert (2017), and municipal music events.

He studied piano under Yuka Ichihara. After working as a concert report writer for the Kawai Music Promotion Association, he spent many years in the music publishing industry while independently composing and arranging music. His CD J.S. Bach & S.L. Weiss: Lute Works Transcribed for Keyboard, for which he handled both planning and arrangement, was selected as a semi-special selection by Record Geijutsu magazine.

In 2022, his Fantasy Sonata on a Theme by Mendelssohn for Guitar, co-composed with Yudai Hatanaka, was premiered by Tsunehito Tsuchihashi. In addition to his musical endeavors, he is also involved in scriptwriting for books and videos on philosophy, expanding his work across multiple fields.

Nanako Sugiura (Supervisor)

Nanako Sugiura is pianist and the Chief Executive of the music label Vacances Musicales. She took her music master's degree at Musashino Academia Musicae. Nanako has been dedicating her career to performing music works composed by Japanese music writers. She is particularly active in commissioning pieces and premiering new works. Since 2016, Nanako has been leading the Evening of Japanese Works series at PTNA's public recording concerts, performing and recording numerous Japanese piano works. Those recorded performance and her analytical commentary on various composers and pieces are widely featured in the PTNA Piano Encyclopedia. She was in charge of editing and proofreading the sheet music collection <Kōsaku Yamada: Rediscovered Piano Works> (published by Muse Press). Nanako also collaborates with Zen-On Music Company Ltd. in publishing Japanese compositions.



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