

10. La Chasse, Op. 100, No. 9

Friedrich Burgmüller

(1806-1874)

arr. William Melton

Burgmüller, Johann Friedrich Franz

(born 4 December 1806 in Regensburg; died 13 February 1874 in Beaulieu/Seine-et-Oise)

Friedrich Burgmüller was born into a rich musical environment. His mother Therese (née Zandt) was a writer on music, his father Johann August Franz was a conductor and his younger brother Norbert would also be a composer. In 1807 his father was engaged as music director in Düsseldorf, where Friedrich spent his childhood and studied both cello and piano. His early professional years were employed performing and teaching in southern Germany, Switzerland and Alsace. His younger brother Norbert's career was in another league altogether—after studies with Louis Spohr and Moritz Hauptmann, Norbert was composing symphonies and string quartets and associating with the likes of Schumann and Mendelssohn. But in 1836 Norbert died from an epileptic seizure while taking the baths in Aachen. He was only 26 years of age, and the German musical press compared the loss with that of Schubert eight years before.

Shortly before his brother's death, Friedrich had moved to Paris—an auspicious decision, for the city that had broken other artists would make Burgmüller's fortune. In a light style that suited Parisian taste he composed albums of salon music for the piano (Schumann praised Burgmüller's *Rêveries fantastiques*, Op. 41). He also wrote works for the stage (including additions to the *Giselle* score that are still played today), the most popular of which was the romantic ballet *La Péri* (1841). He was respected by his peers, and his circle of acquaintances included Auber and Liszt. After 1855 Burgmüller essentially retired to his summer home in Beaulieu, not far from Fontainebleau, where he died in 1874.

Today Burgmüller is best known for his piano studies for children. On arriving in Paris he had become piano tutor to an elite clientele that included the children of King Louis-Philippe, and the *25 études faciles et progressives*,

Op. 100 (Mainz: Schott, c. 1850) is one of the collections of instructional works that these pupils inspired. They remain charming pieces, and durable—‘Ballade’, ‘La Candeur’ and ‘L’Arabesque’ are still heard at student recitals. ‘La Chasse’, the ninth piece in the set, displays a skilful hand at conjuring horn sound on the piano (the composer had already written for horn in the accompanied song ‘Effie’ in 1842, which researcher Mary Burroughs commended for the horn’s ‘especially beautiful phrase endings and interludes’). The evocative horn fifths and octave leaps of the opening of ‘La Chasse’ make way for a contrasting *dolente* section in minor. But the jolly opening material has the last word, fading away to *pianissimo* as the hunt rides off into the distance.

Text by William Melton