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Hey there and welcome to episode 41 of Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music loving families. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I am so happy that you're here with me today. Today's episode is brought to you by my Busy Kids Do Music History course, which is my all-in-one music appreciation course designed especially for homeschooling families. You can find out more about that course at busykidsdopiano.com/musichistory, and I'll include a link to the course in this episode's show notes.

Today we are going to be talking about a technique called "pizzicato". Can you try saying that word with me? Pizzicato. It's a fun word to say, isn't it? It's an Italian word, and when translated it means, "pinched" or "Plucked".

Now you might be wondering what exactly the word "pinched" has to do with music, but pizzicato is a playing technique that involves plucking the strings of a string instrument. Listen to how it sounds when the strings of a violin are plucked with the finger, instead of pulled with the bow of the violin:

Sometimes, if a string player has to play pizzicato for a long time, she may actually put down the bow of the violin while playing the passage. Playing a passage pizzicato gives each note a short, distinct sound. It adds a whole new texture to a piece. Listen to this section of the hugely popular Pizzicato Polka from composers by Johann and Joseph Strauss.

In Pizzicato Polka, the plucking of the strings that is then imitated by other instruments gives the piece a playful and light feel, don't you think? The Pizzicato playing carries this entire piece. But often composers will weave pizzicato passages in and out of a piece.

Listen now to a bit of “Anitra’s Dance” from Edvard Grieg’s famous Peer Gynt Suite. Some violins will play a melody using their bows, while others play, using the pizzicato technique, in the background.

At this point in the play, Peer Gynt meets the Arabic Princess Anitra who charms him with her dancing and convinces him to give her all of his wealth and riches. Do you hear how the pizzicato gives the piece a mischievous sound -- perfect for a dancing princess who is plotting to trick the hero of the story?

If you were to use pizzicato to depict a kind of weather, what kind of weather do you imagine it would sound like? Composer Antonio Vivaldi used the technique to sound like rain drops in his second movement of the “Winter” concerto from his Four Seasons set of violin concertos.

These are the words to the sonnet that is set to this movement of “Winter”: To rest contentedly beside the hearth, while those outside are drenched by pouring rain. What do you think? Does Vivaldi’s use of pizzicato in this piece create the image of sitting by a cozy fireplace while the rain pours outside?

Pizzicato is also a technique used in jazz and bluegrass music. Pizzicato is the typical way to play the double bass in jazz and bluegrass music, as compared to playing the double bass with a bow when playing classical music. Listen to how the double bass sounds when using the pizzicato technique.

Doesn’t it add a rich and interesting texture to the music? If you head on over to my website at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/41, you’ll find a link to a curated playlist of all different kinds of songs that include the pizzicato technique in them on YouTube. It will help you to visualize what it looks like when a string player uses this technique, and you’ll get to see how many different genres of music it can be used in. Again you’ll find all that at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/41.

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Thanks so much for joining me today to learn about the pizzicato technique. I look forward to connecting with you again in 2 weeks on the Busy Kids Love Music podcast. Bye for now!