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Hey there! 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 delighted to have you here with me today. Today's episode is brought to you by Daily Harvest. Daily Harvest is a healthy, plant-based meal delivery system perfect for busy families because their meal and smoothie options are delivered to your doorstep and ready in minutes. My busy kids love their smoothies, and this busy mom enjoys their harvest bowls for quick, healthy lunches. My listeners can get a deal for \$25 off your first box when you visit busykidsdopiano.com/harvest, and I'll share the link for that special offer in the show notes as well.

As you may know, the month of March is Women's History Month. In the world of classical music, men have historically dominated the field when it comes to just about every aspect -- composing, conducting and performing. However, talented and creative women throughout history have fought against the efforts to silence them in this field. We've highlighted some of their efforts on this podcast in the past, and I'll be sure to link to those episodes in the show notes. Today, we're going to focus on one such trailblazing female composer and pianist from the Romantic era of music, Clara Schumann.

Clara Schumann -- who was born Clara Wieck, grew up in Leipzig, Germany. Her father was a professional pianist and her mother, an accomplished singer. We've used the term "child prodigy" to describe talented musicians such as Mozart and Chopin, and Clara Schumann, too, meets the description of a prodigy. She was taught piano by her father, who is said to have given her daily, hour long lessons, followed by two hours of practice. She began touring at the age of 11. She was nicknamed the "Queen of Piano" and was famous all across Europe for her beautiful piano playing. As a pianist, she enjoyed composing works that really showed off a pianist's skill, such as the piece you are listening to now.

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Also at age 11, a young man by the name of Robert Schumann took piano lessons from her father and rented a room in their house. While it started as what we might call a pre-teen infatuation, the two became passionately in love as she grew older.

Robert and Clara played piano together and wrote and studied music together. In 1837, Robert proposed marriage, but Clara's father refused, threatening to shoot Robert if he came near his daughter again. The two continued their relationship and wrote love letters in code and kept their engagement a secret from her father. Eventually they took her father to court in order to obtain the right to marry one another.

The piece you hear now is Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann, which she gave to him as a birthday present in 1853. It contains quotations and allusions to some of Robert's works woven with her own musical ideas and works that she was performing and practicing.

During their courtship, Robert encouraged Clara in her composing career, even arranging for some of her works to be published and including passages from her works in his own compositions. After they married, however, Robert -- and the social norms of the time -- encouraged Clara to put aside her talents as a performer and a musician. She began to only perform and tour when time and finances allowed.

Robert and Clara had eight children. Many consider her greatest work to be the Piano Trio in G Minor that you're listening to now -- and it was written during a time when her husband, Robert, was extremely ill and she had 4 small children in the house. I am sure the Busy parents who are listening can say this was no small feat! A trio means that there were three performers, and in this case the performers were a pianist, violinist and cellist. It was Schumann's first attempt at writing music for instruments that weren't the piano and the voice.

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Robert Schumann wrote very difficult piano music, and wasn't actually able to play all of it both because of its difficulty and because of nerve damage to one of his fingers. He relied on Clara to play and interpret his compositions. Robert Schumann died young, and the last years of his life were filled with sadness. His mental health deteriorated and he became delusional and aggressive, eventually deciding to go to live in an institution so that he wouldn't harm Clara or his children.

While he was institutionalized, Clara again began to tour and perform in order to support their family financially. After Robert's death, she no longer composed, but she did continue to perform and later taught piano at a conservatory.

As you can see, Clara Schumann's life was filled with many ups and downs. Despite obstacles she faced in her personal life and also as a female composer in a field dominated by men, she leaves behind an important legacy as both a performer and composer. If you head on over to his episodes show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/42, you'll find a curated playlist of performances of Clara Schumann's work that I've linked for you to watch on YouTube. Because it's Women's History Month, I've also made a point of finding performances that feature an array of talented female musicians. Again, you'll find that at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/42.

Thanks so much for joining me today to celebrate the life and works of Clara Schumann. I hope you enjoyed learning more about her, and I look forward to connecting with you again in two weeks for more musical discoveries. Bye for now!