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Hey there! Welcome to a brand new episode of Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music loving families. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so happy to have you here with me today.

Today we're going to kick off another composer series. We did one earlier this year that dove into the life and music of Russian composer Tchaikovsky. This series is going to focus on the life and works of a famous German composer from the Baroque period -- Johann Sebastian Bach.

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Germany on March 31, 1685. Bach's father, Johann Ambrosius Bach, came from a long line of musicians and taught his son to play the violin. Sadly, both of Bach's parents died when he was only 10 years old. His older brother -- Johann Christoph Bach -- took over the music lessons and taught him to play the organ. His brother was a keyboard student of another famous composer of the baroque period -- Johann Pachelbel. (Johann was sure a popular name, huh?) Bach became a skilled organist under the instruction of his brother, and also an eventual expert on organ building.

In 1700, Bach's voice landed him a scholarship in a select boys choir at St. Michael's School where he continued to learn and study music. In 1703, Bach's skill as an organist earned him a spot as a member of an orchestra for a duke and then as an organist for New Church by the age of 18. He devoted the majority of his life to composing sacred music, which is music that was written for church and church services. While at New Church he wrote and played music for the church services there and was a music teacher to the local children.

Bach worked at New Church for 4 years and then took a position as organist to the Duke of Saxeweimer, where there was a church with an organ. Bach composed many of his great organ works at this time and became a bit of a famous organist who was invited to play for many other big churches and give advice on organ building.

He was extremely good at improvisation, which means that he could compose or invent music on the spot. One time there was going to be a competition between Bach and a famous French organist named Louis Marchant to see which of the two men was better at improvisation. Bach was practicing the day before and Marchant heard him. Realizing that Bach would easily win the competition, he actually ran away.

In 1714 the Duke made Bach the Concert Master. He was busy writing new music each week for church services. In 1717 he was offered a job in a different town that would pay him more money. The Duke was angry with Bach and didn't want him to go, so he put Bach in prison for a month. Don't worry -- he eventually released him, and Bach took his new position, where he worked for Prince Leopold and was director of music.

During this time, he wrote a lot of music for the orchestra, including some of his famous violin concertos, solo music for violin and for cello, and keyboard music for the harpsichord. He also was choir leader for two churches, taught music classes and gave private lessons. In 1707, Bach married his second cousin Maria Barbara Bach. Together, they had seven children before she died unexpectedly in 1720. A year later, he married Anna Magdalena and had 13 more children, making him the father of 20 children in all. Phew! Two of his sons also became famous composers and musicians, just like their dad.

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Bach was the most famous composer of the Baroque era. Baroque music was fancy and decorated, with lots of complex and elaborate melodies woven together in the music. We play a lot of his music today on the piano, but the piano hadn't yet been invented yet, so Bach wrote his music for an instrument called the harpsichord, which you are listening to now. The harpsichord was a keyboard instrument like the piano, but it wasn't possible to play louder or quieter by pressing the keys with more or less force, the way it is on the piano. The strings of a harpsichord are plucked, unlike piano strings that are hit with small hammers.

Towards the end of his life, Bach began to lose his vision. He had two unsuccessful eye surgeries performed by John Taylor, who was not a very good doctor (he also performed a failed surgery on composer George Frideric Handel). He died after a stroke at the age of 65.

Bach's greatness as a composer wasn't all that appreciated during his lifetime, or even in the recent years following his death. It was when another composer -- Felix Mendelssohn -- performed his St. Matthew's Passion about 70 years following Bach's death, that there became intense interest and appreciation in his great works. In the next few episodes, we will listen to and learn about some of Johann Sebastian Bach's most famous works, so I hope you'll join me for those.

Head over to my website at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/28](http://busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/28). You'll find there a curated playlist on YouTube with the music you heard on today's episode as well as some other arrangements and performances of some of Bach's most famous works. You can also download a transcript of this episode there. Again that's at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/28](http://busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/28). I hope you enjoyed learning a little bit more about the life of Bach in today's episode, and I'm excited to discover things about Bach's music with you in two weeks on our next episode of Busy Kids Love Music.