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Hey there! Thanks for joining me for episode 32 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 that you're here with me. This episode is brought to you by my Busy Preschoolers Do Music course, which is my play-based, pre-piano course for 3-5 year olds. You can learn more about the course at busykidsdopiano.com/busypreschoolers and I'll link to it as well in this episode's show notes.

We've learned about many different instruments in past episodes of the Busy Kids Love Music podcast -- the trumpet, the flute, the cello, the double bass. Today we're going to learn about an instrument that I teach students to play...the piano.

The piano was invented by Bartolomeo Cristoffori in Italy in 1709. This means that a lot of the famous composers whose music you hear on the piano today -- like this piece by Bach -- wasn't originally composed for the piano, but for a predecessor of the piano, such as a harpsichord or clavichord. The clavichord looked similar to a piano but the strings of the instrument were struck by a small blade of metal called a tangent. Early keyboard instruments -- such as organs and clavichords -- had shorter keyboards than the piano we use today. Gradually the keyboard became longer and longer until it had 88 different notes.

At first the instrument was called the fortepiano. Forte means "loud" in Italian, and piano means "soft" in Italian. The piano was given this name because it could be played either loudly or softly, depending on how the pianist struck the keys -- which was something new in keyboard instruments. You couldn't control the volume on a harpsichord or clavichord much. Later, the name changed to piano forte and then just shortened to piano.

When you press a key on the piano, it acts as a wooden lever. The opposite end of the lever jumps up in the air and forces a small,

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felt-covered hammer to press against the piano strings. This makes the sound that you hear. At the same time, another mechanical part -- called a damper -- is forced up into the air. When you release the key, the hammer and the damper fall back down again, which stops the string from vibrating -- and the sound ends. If you ever have a chance to look inside a grand piano when a pianist is playing, you will get to see how the mechanics of this work

Do you hear how this pianist is playing loudly and softly -- and everything in between -- on the piano? The sound board -- the large piece of wood mounted underneath the strings -- and amplifies the strings so they are loud enough to hear. If the soundboard is damaged, the piano doesn't make a sound. While the piano was invented in the early 18th century, it didn't become popular until about 50 years later. Johann Christian Bach -- who was the 18th child of Johann Sebastian Bach -- was the first person to play it for a public concert.

Once the piano became popular in the late 18th century, many composers wrote music for the piano. Composers such as Mozart and Haydn began to write sonatas and concertos for the piano. Ludwig van Beethoven -- who was a famous pianist before he became a famous composer -- also wrote concertos and sonatas for the piano. Smaller pianos were made for use in people's homes as the piano began to replace the clavichord and harpsichord. In the early 19th century, the sound that the piano made became powerful enough to fill large concert halls and during the Romantic period of music, many composers wrote music for the piano. (fade music) The music these composers wrote began to be more difficult to play and was very expressive. One composer who had great influence over piano music during this time period was Franz Liszt.

Liszt was considered the most awesome virtuoso pianist of his time. A virtuoso means that he was a very skilled musician. He was also a famous piano teacher, and taught around 400 students in a time

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span of 40 years. He believed it was an obligation of his genius to not accept payment for his piano lessons, so he never charged his students. When other musicians criticized him for not focusing on composing great symphonies, Liszt said that he placed the piano at the “top of the hierarchy of instruments” because it could evoke “the entire score of the orchestra...the harmony of 100 players.” Liszt liked to experiment with sounds at the piano and transcribed music written for the orchestra -- such as Beethoven’s nine symphonies -- into piano works.

The piano remains a popular instrument with a vast amount of music written for piano solo and piano concertos -- pieces where a solo pianist is accompanied by an orchestra. It’s used in all different styles of music including ragtime and jazz and pop music. If you head over to my website at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/32 you’ll find a link to a curated playlist on YouTube where I’ll be sharing a variety of piano performances with you. Because there is such a vast amount of music written for the piano, it was difficult to narrow it down -- but you’ll find a solid variety on my playlist, including the classical style of Franz Liszt and the jazz fusion of Herbie Hancock. Again, you’ll find that at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/32

I hope you enjoyed learning a little bit about the piano today on Busy Kids Love Music. I look forward to connecting with you again in two weeks for more musical discoveries!