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Hey There! Welcome to Episode 21 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 thrilled to have you here with me today. Today's episode is brought to you by my brand new, free online summer camp called Busy Kids Do Peter & the Wolf. You can join this free, 3-day camp and learn more about Prokofiev's famous symphony for children at busykidsdopiano.com/peter.

In our last episode of Busy Kids Love Music, we learned about the life of famous Russian composer, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky -- some of the ups and downs in his personal life, things that influenced his musical style and what that musical style is like. Today we're going to take a look at one of his famous compositions, The 1812 Overture.

The 1812 Overture is an example of something called PROGRAM MUSIC. Program music is music that represents a theme or an experience -- in this case, the music represents victory of Russia against a series of wars fought during Napoleon's rule over France, which were called the Napoleonic Wars. As the music starts, what are some words you would use to describe the way it sounds?

Some words that I would use to describe this beginning part of the music are: somber, serious -- maybe even a little mournful. This part of the piece is actually a Russian hymn called "O Lord Save Thy People". The instruments you hear are cellos and violas. This part of the piece represents the Russian people praying for an end to the invasion of their country by the French army.

As the piece goes on the excitement builds. Marching armies are represented by the horns in the orchestra. You'll then hear arrangements of the French national anthem, acknowledging the French victories in the war and the capture of Moscow in 1812.

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But that's not the end of the battles yet. Listen carefully and hear a Russian folk dance theme as the Russian army fights back Napoleon's soldiers and France begins to retreat from Moscow. The French national anthem is still played by the horns but it begins to sound more frantic...In the last few minutes of the piece, you'll hear the sound of Tchaikovsky's famous "cannons" and church bells playing triumphantly over Russia's national anthem at the time, "God Save the Tsar!" The cannon sound is represented often by bass drums in the orchestra. But real, actual cannon fire has been used in some recordings.

What do you think of the piece? It's a very famous one, and you may have heard it before as it is often played during fireworks displays or commercials or movies. Would it surprise you to learn that Tchaikovsky himself hated the piece? He described it as "very loud and noisy and completely without artistic merit, obviously written without warmth or love." The overture was very popular, which was very frustrating to Tchaikovsky. He saw the fact that this piece was successful meant that the world cared more about theatrical spectacle than about the more personal, expressive symphonies and concertos he had written. The more popular the overture became, the more Tchaikovsky believed the world misunderstood his music.

If you head over to my website at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/21, you'll find this episode's listening calendar. I'm going to share with you some different performances of the 1812 Overture as well as performances of some of the different pieces of music that are within the piece itself. Again, you'll find all that at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/21. In two weeks we're going to finish out our series on Tchaikovsky by taking a closer look at his famous ballet, Swan Lake. I hope you enjoyed learning a little bit more about the 1812 Overture with me today, and I look forward to digging into Swan Lake with you in two weeks on the Busy Kids Love Music podcast. Bye for now!