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Hello, hello! Welcome to Episode 22 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 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.

The last two episodes of Busy Kids Love Music have been focused on the famous Russian composer from the Romantic period - Tchaikovsky. In Episode 20, we learned a bit about Tchaikovsky's background and life. In our last episode we dug into his famous piece, The 1812 Overture. I'll link to both of those episodes in the show notes in case you haven't had a chance to listen to them yet. Today we're going to focus on another of Tchaikovsky's famous works -- the ballet *Swan Lake*.

Most of the famous ballets you might be familiar with were composed by Tchaikovsky -- *Nutcracker*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* being among the most famous. *Swan Lake* was the first ballet that Tchaikovsky composed - and he began doing so in 1875. Ballet had been around for a while before Tchaikovsky, but music wasn't really the focus. The focus was on the dance -- the music just had to be a string of danceable tunes. Writing music for a ballet wasn't a job that a composer who wrote symphonies would ever have. Tchaikovsky was actually the very first symphonic composer to write music for a ballet -- called the ballet score. When Tchaikovsky wrote *Swan Lake*, he did something that hadn't been done before: he made the music a more important part of the ballet itself. Ballet music was no longer the simple, danceable music it had been in the past. It was now much more complex and dramatic -- which means the dancing also became more complex and dramatic, too!

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The story that the music and dance in *Swan Lake* tells is likely from a combination of Russian and German folk tales or fairy tales. It's the story of the doomed love of a prince and princess. Prince Siegfried goes out hunting one night and chases a group of swans. One of these swans transforms into a beautiful woman named Odette. She tells the prince that she and her friends were turned into swans by the evil Baron Von Rothbart. In order to break the spell, someone who has never loved before must swear an oath of true love and promise to marry her. The prince takes this oath and promises his loyalty to Odette.

Later, at a grand ball at the palace, Prince Siegfried must choose a bride, though he still loves Odette. Suddenly, the music announces the arrival of two guests -- it is Odette! After Odette and Prince Siegfried dance and he asks for her hand in marriage, we learn that the woman he has been dancing was not, in fact, Odette. It was Odile -- the daughter of the evil Baron von Rothbart. Because the prince has asked another to marry him, he has broken his promise to Odette and they can no longer be together.

Now you may have heard of *Swan Lake* and maybe are even familiar with some of the famous music from the ballet, so you know that it is well-loved and famous or it wouldn't still be around. However, as I mentioned before, it was the first time a ballet score had been written that was so dramatic and complex. People didn't really like it. The dancers called the music "undanceable". The conductor actually threw up his hands in despair over the music. When it was performed it was a huge failure. The sets were falling apart. The choreography -- the movements and dance steps that were coordinated to the music -- wasn't very good and the audience wasn't impressed. After a few years of performances, it closed down and was not performed again during Tchaikovsky's lifetime. Eventually, the ballet was revived with different choreography -- and now we know it as one of the most adored classical ballets of all time.

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A single ballerina usually plays the parts of both Odette and Odile, and it is a role that many ballerinas practice and strive for during their careers.

Tchaikovsky makes use of a large orchestra for this ballet. You'll hear haunting melodies from the strings and loud booms from the timpani. He very much enjoyed writing the ballet score, writing letters to friends during the time that shared his excitement about the project. Even though the ballet didn't get much attention during his lifetime, today it is considered to be one of his finest works.

I'd love for you to head to my website at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/22 where you'll find this episode's listening calendar. I think this listening calendar is especially exciting because it contains many performances of Tchaikovsky's ballet, and they are really incredible to watch. So definitely check those out at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/22 and enjoy those performances for the next couple of weeks until a brand new episode of Busy Kids Love Music airs. Thanks so much for joining me today to learn about *Swan Lake*, and I'll see you soon for more musical discoveries.