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Hey there! Carly Seifert here and welcome to Episode 26 of Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music-loving families. Today's episode is brought to you by Busy Kids Do Music, which is my online piano lesson program for kids. We open a few times a year for what we call "public enrollment", which means that anyone who would like to sign up for piano lessons is able to do so. To learn more, visit my website at busykidsdopiano.com/membership and I'll also be sure to link to it in the show notes. This public enrollment period will end on August 19th, so if you're interested in joining, you'll want to make sure you check things out before then.

On the Busy Kids Love Music podcast, we've talked about two different ballets, both by Tchaikovsky -- *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*. Today we are going to learn a little bit more about the history of ballet itself and dig into the role of music in the ballet. When you think of the ballet, you might think of strong dancers in tutus with pointe shoes, leaping and spinning to dramatic music played by an orchestra as a story is told through this music and dance. But ballet didn't really look (or sound) like this when it started out.

Ballet began in Italy in the Renaissance courts. The dancers were wealthy men and women who wore elaborate costumes that were designed to impress their small audiences, but weren't easy to move around in, so there was a limit to the types of steps and movement dancers could actually do when they performed. Ballets at this time were performed in large chambers of noblemen and women and were usually a part of a festival or celebratory event, such as a wedding.

In the 17th century, Catherine de Medici - who was an Italian noblewoman, married King Henry II of France. She was a great supporter of the arts, and began to fund ballet in the French court. The ballet continued to flourish in France, especially under the

reign of King Louis XIV, who founded the Royal Dance Academy in 1661. This academy established standards of ballet and also certified ballet instructors. It was during this time that the first “ballerinas” took the stage after training for years at the Royal Dance Academy.

Opera-ballets and comedy ballets were popular in France, but ballet masters began to rebel against this idea that there needed to be speaking or singing involved with the ballet. They believed ballet could stand on its own without existing inside of an opera or a play. In order for the audience to understand the relationships between characters and follow the story, the ballet would need to have more expressive and dramatic movements. Ballet dancing became much more active at this point, and the costumes ballerinas wore had to change in order to accommodate this.

The tutu -- the skirt we see as sort of the standard ballet costume -- came to be used by a Swedish ballerina named Marie Taglioni in about 1832. Ballerinas had previously worn long skirts to dance in, and clunky shoes on their feet. Because Marie was premiering pointe shoes for the first time in a professional ballet, Marie’s skirt was shortened to calf length so that you could see the footwork on her pointe shoes. Over time, the tutu was shortened and became fuller, eventually being shortened above the knee during the 1870’s to make movement easier.

Just as the costumes and movements of ballet dancers changed over time, so, too, did ballet music. When ballet was performed in the Renaissance courts, there wasn’t much thought given as to what sounds the performers would be moving to -- sometimes there would even be no music played at all!

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That changed when the Italian composer Giovanni Battista Lulli entered the court of the French King. He began to compose music that was faster in speed for ballet productions. He also had an idea that a composer could write all of the music for a single ballet. At the time, that was a pretty wild idea. Ballet was still not its own art form and was a part of a play or opera. But this wild idea would soon become the norm.

If you've listened to our episode about Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*, you know that this was the first time a composer of symphonies wrote music for the ballet. Before this, ballet music wasn't considered to be anything special. It was the symphonies that were considered to be the most important orchestral works. Tchaikovsky changed that idea and went onto compose scores for the ballets *Nutcracker* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, which are some of his most well-known masterpieces. Other impressive composers, such as Igor Stravinsky and Aaron Copeland, continued to compose and innovate ballet music during their careers, elevating and solidifying the importance of music as a part of ballet.

If you head over to my website at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/26, you'll find a curated playlist of songs and performances on YouTube having to do with this week's episode theme -- the ballet. I think you'll really love working your way through this playlist and seeing the incredible dancers perform to the music. Again, you'll find that at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/26.

Thank you so much for joining me today, and I look forward to seeing you again in 2 weeks for more musical discoveries on the Busy Kids Love Music podcast.