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Hi friends, and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, your podcast for learning all about music and the people who create it! I'm your host, Carly Seifert, creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so glad you're here with me today. This is Episode 145, and in honor of St. Patrick's Day, we're learning about one of Ireland's most famous and beloved composers: Turlough O'Carolan! Get ready to step back in time to explore the life and music of this incredible harpist and composer.

Turlough O'Carolan was born in 1670 in County Meath, Ireland. He grew up during a time when traditional Irish music was a huge part of everyday life. When Turlough was about 18 years old, he contracted smallpox, a disease that left him blind. Despite this challenge, Turlough's life took a remarkable turn. He was given a harp and trained as a musician, which led him to become a traveling harpist—performing and composing all across Ireland.

Turlough O'Carolan's music became famous not just for its beauty, but also for the way it blended two styles. He combined the sounds of traditional Irish music with elements of Baroque music, which was popular in Europe at the time. This unique mix made his music unlike anything else people had heard.

Imagine this: O'Carolan would travel from town to town, playing his harp for local families and noble patrons. Many of his compositions were written as tributes to the people he met along the way. These pieces, often called "planxties," were musical thank-yous. A "planxty" is a lively tune dedicated to someone, and O'Carolan composed dozens of them! Planxties are usually upbeat, but still slower than a jig. One example is Planxty Irwin, the cheerful melody full of energy and grace that you are listening to now.

Another fun fact about Turlough O'Carolan is that he was known for his sense of humor and storytelling. His performances weren't

just about music—he was an entertainer who brought joy to the people he met.

The Baroque period, which we've talked about in depth on another episode of Busy Kids Love Music, lasted from about 1600 to 1750. It was a time when composers like Johann Sebastian Bach and Antonio Vivaldi were creating music filled with elaborate melodies and dramatic contrasts. This style often featured complex harmonies and a focus on ornamentation, which means adding fancy details to the music. Let's talk more about the style of music Turlough O'Carolan created. His compositions often featured melodies that sounded like traditional Irish tunes, but he also added harmonies and structures inspired by Baroque composers like Bach and Vivaldi. This combination of styles made his music special and timeless.

One of his most famous works is Carolan's Concerto. While the word "concerto" might make you think of a big orchestra, this piece is written for the harp and is filled with delicate, elegant melodies. Let's take a moment to listen to an excerpt. As you listen, try to imagine how this music blends the spirit of Ireland with the refinement of European Baroque.

Isn't that beautiful? You can hear the dance-like rhythm and the graceful phrases that make it feel like a perfect balance of Irish and Baroque music.

Turlough O'Carolan left behind over 200 compositions, many of which are still played today by harpists and traditional Irish musicians. Some of his other famous works include this hauntingly beautiful tune, whose title translates to "Big Fairy." It's often played on the harp, fiddle or bagpipes.

Each of these works shows O'Carolan's ability to tell stories through music and his love for combining Irish traditions with European influences.

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Even though Turlough O'Carolan lived more than 300 years ago, his music is still loved and performed around the world. Harpists continue to play his works, and his compositions are an important part of traditional Irish music. In fact, some people even call him the "last of the bards" because of his role in keeping Ireland's musical traditions alive. I've included a link to a curated playlist of some of his most beloved works in this episode's show notes at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/145](https://busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/145). The playlist is lovely background music during all your St. Patrick's Day crafts, lessons or perhaps your Irish feast! Again you can find that linked at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/145](https://busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/145)

Thank you for joining me today to learn about Turlough O'Carolan and his incredible contributions to music. Have a wonderful St. Patrick's Day, and don't forget to celebrate with some Irish music! Until next time, keep listening and learning and I'll look forward to connecting with you again in two weeks when our next brand new episode of Busy Kids Love Music airs. Bye for now!