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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 146, and today we're diving into the world of sonatas! What is a sonata? Why have so many composers written them? And how can we listen for their special structure? We'll answer all these questions and more, so let's get started!

The word "sonata" comes from the Italian word "sonare," which means "to sound." In the early days of classical music, a sonata simply referred to any instrumental piece—music that was played rather than sung. But as time went on, the term "sonata" began to describe a very specific type of composition.

Simply put, a sonata is a piece of music that typically has three or four sections, or movements, and it's often written for just one instrument, like the piano, or for a small group of instruments, like a violin and piano together. But the most important part of a sonata is its structure, called the sonata form. This form is like a roadmap that composers use to organize their music, especially in the first movement of a sonata.

Sonata form has three main sections: the exposition, the development, and the recapitulation. Think of it as a musical story with a beginning, middle, and end. Let's break it down:

The exposition is the first part, where the composer introduces the main themes or melodies. There are usually two main themes: the first one is often bold and energetic, and the second one is softer and more lyrical. These themes are like characters in a story.

The middle part of the sonata is the development, where the composer takes the themes from the exposition and plays around with them. The music might change keys, become more dramatic,

transcript.

or introduce new ideas. It's like the "adventure" part of the story.

Finally, the music returns to the themes we heard at the beginning, but now they sound a little different. This section is called the recapitulation, and it is where the composer brings everything back home, wrapping up the story.

Now that we know what a sonata is, let's explore some famous ones and hear how this structure works. You might want to grab some headphones for this part so you can really listen to the details!

Let's go back to the Sonata that we opened with, Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 15 in C Major:

This sonata is sometimes called "The Easy Sonata" because it's simple enough for many piano students to learn. But it's also a masterpiece! Listen for the cheerful, bright melody at the beginning. This is the first theme – the exposition. Then, Mozart introduces a second, smoother theme in a different key.

The middle section, the development, gets a little darker and more dramatic as Mozart explores and plays with those themes.

At the end, the first and second themes return, but now they're in the same key as the beginning. This is the recapitulation section.

Let's check out another incredibly famous but very different sounding sonata, Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata in C-sharp minor. This sonata is one of Beethoven's most famous pieces, and it has a very different mood. Instead of starting with a lively movement, it begins with a slow, dreamy one.

The first theme of the exposition is calm and mysterious, almost like a lullaby.

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In this piece, the development section doesn't feel dramatic like in other sonatas. Instead, it stays soft and reflective:

In the recapitulation, the themes return, but they feel even more emotional than before.

Next time you listen to a sonata, try to follow the roadmap of sonata form. I even made a special printable road map for you to follow along with when you're listening. You'll also find a linked playlist of sonatas to listen along to with your roadmap. As you do, you can ask yourself: Can I hear when the exposition ends and the development begins? Do the themes come back in the recapitulation? Listening for these changes can make the music even more exciting! Again, you can download your Sonata Road Map and listen to a sonata playlist at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/146.

That's all for today's episode! I hope you enjoyed learning about sonatas and how composers use this special form to tell musical stories. Thanks for joining me today, and don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss our next episode. Until next time, keep listening and keep learning, and I'll see you in two weeks when our next brand new episode airs. Bye for now!