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Hello, and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast that helps you explore the music of composers, cultures, and traditions from all around the world. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and you're joining me for our annual summer adventure: Around the World with Busy Kids Love Music.

For each episode this summer, we're exploring a new country through its folk music. So far, we've visited Ethiopia, Ukraine, and South Korea. This week, we're traveling to South America to a country full of rhythm, color, and joyful sound: Colombia!

Colombia is a country in the northwestern part of South America. It's bordered by both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, which means it has all kinds of landscapes—mountains, jungles, beaches, and cities! Because of this variety, Colombia also has many different regional styles of folk music. You'll find African-inspired drum music on the coast, Indigenous flute songs in the mountains, and Spanish-style melodies in the countryside.

Colombia's music reflects the mix of three main cultural influences:

- Indigenous peoples who have lived there for thousands of years,
- Africans who were enslaved and forced to come to Colombia
- and Spanish colonists who arrived in the 1500s.

Over time, these influences blended together to create some of the most vibrant folk music in the world.

One of the most famous Colombian folk styles is called cumbia. Cumbia started along the Caribbean coast and originally combined African drums, Indigenous flutes, and Spanish melodies. It began as a courtship dance—a way for people to express affection and tell stories through movement and music.

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Today, cumbia is performed all over Colombia—and even in other countries in Latin America! It features catchy rhythms, repeated drum patterns, and joyful melodies that make you want to dance.

Let's take a look at some of the traditional instruments used in Colombian folk music. The gaita is a long, Indigenous flute made from cactus wood and beeswax. It has a deep, breathy sound and is often played in pairs—one flute plays the melody, and the other keeps a steady rhythm. Listen for the pair of gaitas in this excerpt:

The tambora – a kind of big, bass drum – is popular with the African – Colombian communities along the coast. It's key to the rhythms of cumbia and other coastal styles. The tambora is a large drum played with sticks called baquetas. Musicians chant and play these drums at social gatherings or during the worship of saints. The drum itself is made from tree bark and covered with deer, goat or sheepskin.

You might be familiar with this instrument that is common in Colombian folk music...

That's right—the accordion is also a big part of Colombian folk music, especially in vallenato, which comes from the rural areas in northern Colombia. The accordion is actually a European instrument, brought to South America by travelers and settlers from Europe in the 1800s. But over time, Colombian musicians made it their own! They blended its bouncy sound with local drums and rhythms to create something completely unique. In vallenato music, the accordion is the star—played with fast finger work and lively energy that makes people want to dance and sing along.

Folk music in Colombia is more than just music—it's part of life. There are folk songs for harvesting crops, celebrating holidays, and dancing at festivals. In fact, each region of Colombia has its own folk traditions and costumes. Some music includes call-and-response singing, while other songs are full of poetic lyrics and storytelling.

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And even today, folk music is a big part of Colombian culture. Many children learn these songs in school, and performers of all ages play at local festivals and parades. Modern Colombian artists often mix folk instruments with pop, rock, or salsa music to create new sounds that still celebrate their musical roots.

Isn't it amazing how Colombian music blends history, geography, and culture all into one joyful sound?

Now that you've visited Colombia through music, it's time to add another stamp to your musical passport! You can find the printable Colombia passport stamp in the show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/154. There, you'll also find the link to a curated playlist of Colombian folk music, where you can see performances of the cumbia, vallenato, and Indigenous music we heard on today's episode.

In two weeks, we'll wrap up our Around the World journey with one last stop—so don't miss it!

Until then... keep listening, keep learning, and keep making music. Bye for now!