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Hello and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast that helps you discover 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 the final stop on this summer's adventure: Around the World with Busy Kids Love Music!

All summer long, we've been collecting passport stamps and exploring the folk music of countries around the globe. So far, we've visited Ethiopia, Ukraine, South Korea, and Colombia. Today, we're heading to a tropical island in the South Pacific with deep cultural traditions and incredible rhythms: Tahiti!

Before we dive in, I have some exciting news—public enrollment for both Busy Kids Do Piano and Busy Moms Do Piano opens on August 4th! If you've been thinking about starting piano lessons at home, this is your chance to jump in and join our amazing community of learners. Stay tuned for details in the coming weeks and check this episode's show notes for the links to learn more about these online piano lesson programs.

Okay, let's travel to Tahiti!

Tahiti is the largest island in a group of islands called French Polynesia, located in the South Pacific Ocean. French Polynesia is made up of more than 100 islands, all part of a region known as Oceania. While French is the official language (because the islands are a part of France), many people also speak Tahitian, a Polynesian language.

Geographically, Tahiti is filled with beautiful landscapes—tall mountains, lush rainforests, and sparkling blue lagoons. But just as stunning as the scenery is the island's musical tradition, which has been passed down through generations.

Tahiti's music is closely tied to dance, and one of the most exciting styles is the 'ote'a.

The 'ote'a is a traditional Tahitian dance that features fast, rhythmic drumming and rapid hip movements. The costumes are elaborate, typically consisting of a long grass skirt, belting with tassels to show off all the hip motions, and decorated headpieces. This dance is still a big part of festivals and cultural performances. In fact, the Heiva Festival in Tahiti is one of the largest cultural celebrations in all of French Polynesia, and it features stunning performances and competitions of dance, singing and drumming. As always, I'll link to a performance of this dance in the show notes so that you can be sure to see it for yourself!

Now let's talk about drumming, which is a big part of traditional Tahitian music. Tahitian drumming follows special rhythms, rules, and patterns that are passed down from master drummers. They use different kinds of drums to create layers of sound that drive the dancing. The to'ere (TOH-eh-reh) is a wooden slit drum that makes a sharp, loud sound when struck with a stick, which sounds like this.

The pahu (PAH-hoo) is a large drum made from a hollowed-out tree trunk with a sharkskin or goatskin top. It gives a deep, booming sound and the fa'atete is a smaller drum that adds faster rhythms to the mix. These drums work together to create complex, interlocking rhythms. Each drummer knows exactly when to play, and dancers use those rhythms to guide their movements.

Another unique and beautiful form of traditional Tahitian music is called himene tarava. This is a type of group singing, or choral chant, that blends Polynesian vocal traditions with influences from European hymns brought by missionaries in the 1800s. In himene tarava, singers perform in rich, layered harmonies, often starting slowly and softly, then gradually growing louder and more complex.

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It was a way of adapting the European Christian hymns into traditional Polynesian polyphonic styles. The music swells and flows like waves in the ocean, and each vocal part interlocks with the others in a way that feels both powerful and peaceful. You can still hear himene tarava today in churches and at festivals throughout French Polynesia, where it remains a treasured part of cultural life.

Tahitian folk music, like many traditions we've explored this summer, is still alive and celebrated today. Children learn drumming and dance from a young age, and traditional music is passed down at schools, festivals, and family gatherings. Some modern musicians mix the sounds of the to'ere and pahu with ukuleles or even electronic music to keep the traditions fresh and fun.

What a fun and rhythmic way to end our musical journey around the world! From the powerful drums to the fast-paced dances, Tahitian music is a celebration of community, nature, and movement.

Don't forget to download your Tahiti passport stamp in today's show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/155. You'll also find some links to live Tahitian drum and dance performances to keep the music going at home.

Thanks for traveling with me this summer! I hope you've enjoyed learning about the folk music of so many incredible places. Even though our journey is wrapping up, there's always more music to discover, and we'll be exploring loads of it in the Busy Kids Love Music podcast. I hope you'll join me again in 2 weeks when a brand new episode airs. Bye for now!