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Hello and welcome 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 I'm so glad you're joining me for the final episode in our 3-part series about the brilliant French composer Camille Saint-Saëns. Don't forget — today's episode includes an Audio Treasure Hunt! I've hidden the answers to six questions throughout this episode, so make sure you're listening carefully. You can download the free Treasure Hunt printable in the show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/158.

Today, we're diving into one of Saint-Saëns' spookiest and most imaginative works — Danse Macabre. That title might sound a little mysterious, so let's start by figuring out what it means.

Danse Macabre is a French phrase that means "Dance of Death." Now, before you get too nervous — don't worry! This piece might sound a little eerie, but it's all in good fun. It's sort of like a musical Halloween costume party. Saint-Saëns wasn't trying to scare anyone — he was using his music to tell a dramatic and playful story, full of dancing skeletons and midnight mischief.

The word macabre describes something spooky or creepy, but I want us to look at this music more like a ghost tale told around a campfire or a silly monster dance. It's not meant to be truly scary, but to spark your imagination.

Saint-Saëns wrote Danse Macabre in 1874. At first, he wrote it as a song for voice and piano, based on a French poem. But he later transformed it into a piece for orchestra — and that's the version most people know today.

According to the story behind the music, every year on Halloween night, Death comes out at midnight and plays his violin. As he plays, skeletons rise from their graves and begin to dance. They twirl and leap under the moonlight until the rooster crows at dawn — and they quickly return to their graves until next year.

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Kind of like a silly skeleton dance party, right?

Let's talk about a few of the musical clues Saint-Saëns gives us to help tell this story:

It's a little tricky to hear, but in the opening of the piece, the clock strikes 12, the moment when the skeletons begin their dance. You'll hear it played by the harp — 12 notes to represent the twelve chimes of the clock.

Listen for the violin at the beginning of the piece. It plays a very unusual note called a tritone — sometimes called “The Devil's Interval” in olden times because it sounds so mysterious and unsettling. It's one of the ways Saint-Saëns sets the spooky mood!

Next, listen for the xylophone. When you hear it, imagine dancing skeletons rattling their bones. The xylophone makes a clicking sound that's perfect for this kind of imagery. This is the same instrument Saint-Saëns used to create the sound of rattling bones for the “Fossils” piece from *Carnival of the Animals*!

The music grows more and more wild and energetic as the skeletons dance the night away. See if you can imagine the different characters Saint-Saëns might be painting with sound — is there a clumsy skeleton? A graceful dancer? A marching parade of bones?

And don't miss the ending! Right before the piece finishes, you'll hear the music quiet down as the **rooster crows**, played by the oboe, and all the skeletons rush back to their graves before sunrise.

When *Danse Macabre* was first performed, audiences didn't quite know what to think! Some people thought it was too strange or too dark. But over time, it became one of Saint-Saëns' most beloved pieces. Today, it's used all the time in movies, cartoons, and even ballet performances — especially around Halloween. It's the perfect mix of spooky and silly.

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Saint-Saëns was proud of how he used different instruments and rhythms to paint such a vivid picture — and musicians still enjoy playing it today because it's so dramatic and full of energy.

So whether you're listening in the fall, around Halloween time, or anytime you're in the mood for something playfully spooky, Danse Macabre is a fantastic example of how music can tell a story and bring your imagination to life.