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Hi everyone, and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast that helps families explore the wonderful world of music together. I'm Carly Seifert, creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so glad you're here with me today.

We are three stops into our summer world tour, and I have to say — this summer's lineup has been so much fun to put together. Two weeks ago we visited Norway and explored the haunting, resonant world of the Hardanger fiddle, with its hidden strings that hum and sing along with every note that's played. And before that, we spent time in Puerto Rico learning about bomba, plena, and the long, layered history behind one of the most vibrant musical cultures in the Caribbean.

If you've missed either of those episodes, I'd love for you to go back and catch them — you can find Puerto Rico at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/177, and Norway at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/178, and I'll link them in the show notes as well.

Today we are stamping our passport with stop number three, and we are heading to the continent of Africa — specifically to the most populous country on the entire continent, a place with more than 500 distinct ethnic groups, hundreds of languages, and one of the richest and most diverse musical traditions in the world.

We are landing in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a large country on the western coast of Africa, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the south and by Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin on its other sides. It's home to more than 200 million people, making it by far the most populated country in Africa and one of the most populated in the entire world. The landscape ranges from tropical rainforests and river deltas in the south to open savanna and semi-desert in the north, and the people who call Nigeria home are extraordinarily diverse — speaking different languages, practicing

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different traditions, and making different kinds of music depending on where they come from.

Before we explore the music, though, I want to spend a moment on history — because understanding Nigeria's past is essential to understanding its musical soul.

People have lived in what is now Nigeria for thousands of years, and some of the earliest known civilizations in sub-Saharan Africa emerged in this region. The Nok civilization left behind remarkable terracotta sculptures and evidence of an organized, sophisticated society. Later, great kingdoms and empires rose and fell across the region — the Yoruba kingdoms of the southwest, the Benin (Beh-noon) Kingdom in the south with its extraordinary bronze and ivory artworks, the Hausa city-states of the north, and the Igbo communities of the southeast, among many, many others.

Each of these peoples developed their own distinct musical traditions over centuries — their own instruments, their own rhythms, their own songs for planting and harvesting, for birth and death, for coronations and ceremonies and religious life. Music in Nigerian cultures was rarely just entertainment. It was functional and spiritual and communal in ways that are sometimes hard for us to fully imagine from the outside.

When European colonizers arrived in the 15th century — first Portuguese traders, then the British — the impact on Nigerian peoples was devastating. The transatlantic slave trade, which ran for roughly four centuries, tore millions of people from West and Central Africa and sent them across the ocean to the Americas and the Caribbean. Nigeria was one of the primary regions from which enslaved people were taken, which means the musical DNA of Nigeria is woven deeply into the folk traditions of places like Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, and the American South. When we listened to Puerto Rican bomba two weeks ago, we were hearing, in part, a tradition with deep roots in exactly this part of the world.

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It's worth pausing on that for a moment, because it's a remarkable thing: music carried across the ocean by force, replanted in new soil, and growing into something new without ever losing its essential character. The rhythms survived. The call and response survived. The deep connection between music and community survived. That is a testament to how fundamental music is to human identity.

British colonial rule over Nigeria continued until 1960, when Nigeria gained independence. Throughout the colonial period, Nigerian people held tightly to their musical traditions, just as we saw in Norway — folk music as a form of cultural resistance, a way of saying: this is who we are, and no outside power can take that from us.

Now, because Nigeria is so large and so diverse, I want to focus our time today on a few of the most significant and widely known folk music traditions — starting with one instrument that I think is going to stop your kids in their tracks the moment they hear it.

That is the talking drum — called the dundun (doon-don) in Yoruba — an hourglass-shaped drum with two drum heads connected by leather cords running along the sides. The player holds the drum under one arm and uses those cords to squeeze the drum as they strike it with a curved stick. By tightening or loosening their grip on the cords, the player changes the tension of the drum heads, which raises or lowers the pitch of each stroke. And because the Yoruba language is a tonal language — meaning that the pitch of a word actually changes its meaning — a skilled talking drum player can reproduce the rising and falling tones of spoken Yoruba with extraordinary precision.

In other words, the drum talks.

A master dundun player can send messages across communities, announce the arrival of important people, praise a king, tell a story, or hold a conversation — all through the language of rhythm and pitch. The drum doesn't just accompany the music. In many contexts, the drum is the communication.

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This concept of the talking drum goes far beyond just the Yoruba people — variations of the talking drum exist across West Africa, and the idea that percussion can carry language is such a profound musical idea. For kids who are learning that music is a form of communication, the talking drum is a literal example: here is an instrument that doesn't just feel like language. It actually is language.

The Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria have one of the richest musical traditions on the continent. Music is central to Yoruba spiritual life, particularly in the Ifá tradition — an ancient system of divination and spiritual knowledge that UNESCO has recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Specific rhythms on the dundun and other drums are used to call upon spiritual forces, to open ceremonies, and to honor ancestors.

But Yoruba music isn't only ceremonial. The jùjú music tradition, which grew out of traditional Yoruba folk music in the early 20th century, blends the dundun and other traditional percussion with guitar and vocal harmonies, creating something that is deeply rooted in folk tradition while also evolving with the times. King Sunny Ade, whom you're listening to now, is one of Nigeria's most beloved musicians internationally. He helped bring jùjú music to global audiences in the 1980s and remains a celebrated artist today. When you listen to jùjú music, you can hear the talking drum sitting right at its heart — the folk tradition carrying itself forward into the modern world.

Moving to southeastern Nigeria, the Igbo people have their own distinct and beautiful musical traditions. Igbo folk music is closely tied to community life — to the agricultural calendar, to festivals, to the celebration of individual and collective milestones. One of the most important Igbo instruments is the ojà, (oh-jah) a small wooden flute that produces a breathy, soulful tone and is often played in ensembles alongside percussion.

The Igbo also have a rich tradition of ogene music (Oh-geh-ne), which

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uses large iron bells struck with wooden mallets to create interlocking rhythmic patterns — multiple bells playing different rhythms that weave together into something greater than any one part.

Can you hear how those overlapping rhythms fit together? That concept of interlocking parts — where each individual rhythm seems incomplete on its own but together they create something rich and whole — is one of the defining features of West African music more broadly, and it shows up in Nigerian music across many different ethnic traditions. It's also, by the way, one of the reasons that West African rhythmic traditions had such a profound influence on jazz, blues, and gospel music in America. Those interlocking, layered rhythms came with enslaved Africans and never left.

Nigeria's folk music traditions are not only alive — they are thriving and evolving in some of the most exciting ways in contemporary music. Afrobeats is a modern Nigerian popular music style that has become a major global sound. Music artists have brought Nigerian music to global audiences, and if you listen closely to their productions you can hear the echo of Yoruba rhythms, the call-and-response patterns of folk tradition, and the layered percussion that has been at the heart of Nigerian music for centuries.

Today we stamped our passport with stop number three on this summer's world tour — Nigeria, with its thousands of years of civilization, the remarkable language of the talking drum, the interlocking rhythms of the ogene bells and the living thread that connects all of it to some of the most exciting music being made in the world today.

I've got your newest passport stamp and a curated listening playlist in the show notes so you and your kids can keep exploring after the episode ends. You'll find that at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/179.

And one more thing — if Busy Kids Love Music has been part of your family's summer this year, would you take just two minutes to leave a

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rating and review wherever you listen to podcasts? It is genuinely one of the most helpful things you can do to help other families find the show. Every review makes a difference, and I'm so grateful for each one.

Two more passport stamps still ahead of us this summer. I'll see you back here in two weeks for stop number four. Until then — keep listening, keep learning, and keep making music. Thanks so much for being here!