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Hi everyone, and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast where we explore the music we love and the instruments and people who make it. I'm your host, Carly Seifert, creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so glad you're here today.

Well, here we are. Over the last few episodes, we've been building an orchestra together, one family at a time. We've met the strings, we've met the woodwinds, and last time we met the big, bold brass. Today we add the fourth and final family, and I saved a fun one for the end — the percussion.

Now, you know the drill by now. For the woodwinds, I had you take a deep breath. For the brass, I had you buzz your lips like a motorboat. So here's your job for today, and it might be the easiest one yet. Clap your hands together, just once. Go ahead. (brief pause) There. You just played a percussion instrument, and you didn't even need to buy anything, because it was your own two hands.

Before we start listening, I have one more printable for you, to finish out our set. It's the Percussion Family Spotter, and you can download it for free in the show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/184. There are a lot of instruments in this family, so this one's especially fun to listen for — check off each one as you hear it, jot down what it sounds like, and color in your Percussion Spotter badge when you're done. If you'd like to follow along, pause for a moment and print it out.

Okay — let's talk about what makes an instrument part of the percussion family.

The other families each had one special way of making sound. Strings are played by bowing or plucking. Woodwinds start with your breath. Brass starts with a buzz. But percussion? Percussion is the family you play by hitting it, shaking it, scraping it, or tapping it. Basically, if you strike something and it makes a sound, you've found a percussion instrument.

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That makes this the biggest and most colorful family of them all. There are more percussion instruments than I could possibly name in one episode — drums of every size, cymbals, triangles, tambourines, xylophones, chimes, gongs, cowbells, wood blocks, even things like sandpaper blocks and a slide whistle. If you can imagine hitting it, some composer somewhere has probably written music for it.

To keep things simple, we can sort this giant family into two groups.

The first group is the percussion instruments that don't play a specific note. We call these unpitched. Their job is rhythm — keeping the beat and adding excitement. Think of a snare drum, a bass drum, cymbals crashing, or a triangle going ding. They don't play a melody you could sing, but oh, do they bring the energy.

The second group is the percussion instruments that can play specific notes, which we call pitched. These can actually play a melody. The xylophone is a great example, with its wooden bars that each sound a different note when you tap them. So are the big kettle-shaped timpani drums, which can be tuned to exact notes.

Now for the fun part — let's listen.

Let's start with the group that keeps the beat, the unpitched percussion, and there's no better place to hear them show off than a big, dramatic finale. In Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture," which we covered all the way back in Episode 21, the percussion section absolutely takes over at the end — crashing cymbals, booming bass drum, and even cannons.

Can you hear how the percussion makes it feel enormous and exciting, like the whole room might shake? That's what this group does best.

And here's a moment you might remember. Over the last two episodes, we've been listening to *Peter and the Wolf* from Episode 122 — the woodwinds played the bird, the duck, the cat, and the grandfather, and

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the brass gave us the wolf. But do you remember how the story ends? The hunters come marching out of the forest, firing their guns. And Prokofiev made those gunshots with percussion — the timpani and the bass drum.

So it turns out the percussion family was in that story all along, waiting for the very end. That's the whole orchestra, right there in one piece.

Now let's hear the other group, the pitched percussion that can actually play a tune. One of my favorite examples comes from Saint-Saëns and "The Carnival of the Animals," which we explored in Episode 157. In the movement called "Fossils," he uses a xylophone to sound like old, rattling bones — a perfect, slightly spooky use of those crisp wooden bars.

Hear how the xylophone plays a real melody, and not just a rhythm? That's the difference between our two groups — and it's a great one to listen for.

And now I've saved the best part of this whole series for the very end, because there's one more pitched percussion instrument I haven't mentioned yet. It's one you almost certainly have in your house, or close by. It's the piano.

That's right — the piano is part of the percussion family. Here's why. When you press a key on the piano, you can't see it, but inside the instrument a little felt-covered hammer swings up and strikes a string. Press the key, the hammer hits the string, and you get a sound. Striking to make sound — that's percussion, through and through.

So all this time, as we've traveled through the strings and the woodwinds and the brass, the instrument so many of you are learning at home has belonged to the family we're talking about today. Isn't that a fun thing to know? The next time you sit down at the piano, you can remember that you're not just playing keys — you're playing the biggest, most surprising family in the whole orchestra.

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So let's gather all four families together, one last time. The strings, which we bow and pluck. The woodwinds, which start with our breath. The brass, which starts with a buzz. And the percussion, which we play by striking, shaking, and tapping. Put them all in one room together, and you have an orchestra — and now you know every family in it.

If you printed out your Percussion Family Spotter, take a look and see how many you found today. And if you've been collecting all four Spotters through this series, you now have a complete set — one for each family of the orchestra. I hope you'll keep them somewhere handy, so that the next time you listen to a piece of music, you and your kids can play a little game of "which family do you hear?" You can also use it when listening to the playlist that I've linked in the show notes to accompany this podcast episode at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/184. On the playlist you'll find full length performances of all the songs we listened to in today's episode.

Well, that ALMOST wraps up our journey through the orchestra. There's one last part of the orchestra we haven't talked about yet – it's not an instrument family, but it's still an important part of the orchestra. To find out what it is, tune into our next brand new episode in 2 weeks, wherever you listen to your podcasts.

Until then — keep listening, keep learning, and keep making music. Thanks for joining me on Busy Kids Love Music!