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Hey there and welcome to our 50th episode of Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music loving families. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so happy to have you here with me today as we continue our summer podcast series -- Around the World with Busy Kids Love Music. Before we get started, I wanted to let you know about my Busy Kids Do Music History course. If you're a homeschooling family and you're sorting out which courses and curricula you're using for this year, be sure to check this course out for your music history and appreciation course. You can learn more about it at busykidsdopiano.com/musichistory and I'll link to it in the show notes as well.

Our last stop on our Around the World with Busy Kids Love Music tour was in Ireland, and today we're heading east of Ireland -- actually to the far East -- to learn about the folk music of Japan.

Japanese folk music and many of the musical instruments used were influenced by music from China, and were then adapted to meet the needs and style of the Japanese people. The two oldest forms of this historical folk music are called shomyo or gagaku.

Shomyo is ritual music sung in a Buddhist ceremony by a group of monks. The word shomyo, when translated, combines the characters for "voice" and "wisdom".

This type of chant was brought to Japan by 8th century monks who were returning from China and elaborated upon the chants they learned while there. It was very multicultural in nature: the text was in Sanskrit from India, bells and gongs were from China, and wooden percussion from Japan.

Gagaku is the second of the oldest historical Japanese folk music, and it was used for Japanese performance. It included dances and songs -- some which were in an instrumental style and others in a form of vocal music. The word gagaku literally means elegant music, and it was typically patronized -- or financially supported -- by the Imperial Court or temples or shrines. The emphasis of this type of music is on the timbre TAMBER, which is a word that means the quality of the musical sound. If your ears are used to listening to Western style music, this might be different for you! There are sixteen instruments that are typically used to play gagaku music, and they are from the woodwinds, string and percussion families.

Japan has several forms of theater in which its traditional music played an important role. Noh (n-o-h) musical theater is the oldest form of theater. Performers are typically accompanied by a small group of instrumentalists who play a taiko, which is a stick drum, a big hourglass-shaped drum and a small hour-glass shaped drum and a bamboo flute called the nohkan. This ensemble performs with the vocalists to create this theatrical music. You'll sometimes here Noh referred to as "Japanese Opera"

Kabuki is another type of Japanese theater with different categories of music. Kabuki is known for having highly stylized dancing, singing and movement. An all-male cast usually performs in elaborate makeup. During the course of a kabuki performance, musicians will be located both on and off stage. Be sure to check out this episode's show notes where I've included a playlist that will show performances of these theatrical forms of traditional Japanese music.

You'll notice in the examples of Japanese folk music you've heard in this episode that there isn't really a distinct rhythm, the way you often hear in Western music. Music has blank spaces of silence called - ma. These silences are so important and are considered the heart of traditional Japanese music.

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We've only just touched on a bit of the diverse range of folk music in Japan, but I hope you've enjoyed learning more about this traditional, ancient style of music that might be very new to your ears! If you head over to my show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/50, you'll be able to print the Japan stamp to add to your Busy Kids Love Music passport as well as explore the curated playlist I've put together for you that contains links to the music you've heard in today's episode as well as other examples of Japanese folk music. Again all of that can be found at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/50

Thanks so much for joining me today on our visit to Japan, and I look forward to connecting with you again in 2 weeks for our FINAL stop on our summer series -- Around the World with the Busy Kids Love Music Podcast. Bye for now!