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Hey there and welcome to episode 52 of Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music loving families. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and before we get started, I just wanted to let you know that my online piano lesson programs, Busy Kids Do Piano and Busy MOMS Do Piano, open next week, on August 23rd, for a limited-time public enrollment. Public enrollment just means that anyone and everyone who would like to join my piano lesson programs is able to do so. You can read more about my piano lesson program for kids at busykidsdopiano.com/membership or my piano program for adults busymomsdopiano.com/membership, and I'll link to those pages in the show notes as well.

Here on the Busy Kids Love Music podcast, we've spent time learning about many different musical instruments such as the trumpet, saxophone, cello and piano. In today's episode, we are going to learn about one of the oldest instruments in the world -- the harp.

The harp is a stringed instrument with an ancient lineage. It was first depicted on the sides of ancient Egyptian tombs 3000 BCE. While we don't know from the pictures what the ancient harp sounded like, we do know that there appears to have been many harps in ancient Egypt, Assyria and Mesopotamia. One of the earliest pictures of a harp was on a vase found in a Babylonian temple. The harps in these depictions were angled and had 12-15 strings.

The continent of Africa has the largest variety of harps, and the harp is part of the traditions of around 150 African peoples. The harp in Africa was used as a musical instrument and as a work of sculpture which was important in dance, rituals and story-telling. Many of the harps incorporate the human form as the body of the instrument, making them a beautiful and important work of art as well as musical instrument.

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The way a harp looks will be different depending on which part of the world it is being used, and for what purpose. There are small harps that can be played on a harpist's lap, and there are large harps that are heavy and rest on the floor while being played. Some harps have strings made of nylon and others of metal. The three parts that all harps have are a neck, which is the upper part of the harp, a resonator -- also called the belly -- which is perpendicular to the plane of the strings and then, the strings. Each string produces one note, and the strings vary in pitch from high to low, depending on the length of the string.

During the Romantic period of music, the harp went through some technological improvements, and the concert harp made use of pedals - foot-controlled devices which can alter the pitch of the strings. The pedal harp contains seven pedals, which were introduced in 1697 and then upgraded to a more advanced pedal system in 1811. With the addition of pedals, the harp gradually became a part of the classical orchestra.

If you listen to early classical music, you'll notice the harp was only used a handful of times by some of the more famous composers, such as Mozart or Beethoven. Fast forward to the 20th century and you'll find the pedal harp is not only used in classical music, but also jazz, pop and new age music as well.

The harp is often called "an instrument of the people". We may think of it today as something that is only played in fancy orchestras, but the harp truly has a long history of being played by anyone with the desire to practice -- whether you are a Celtic peasant or a wealthy nobleman.

Someone who plays music without referring to sheet music and plays mostly folk and traditional music is called a harper. A harpist is typically the term used for a musician who reads music and plays classical and jazz on a pedal concert harp.

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Head over to this episode's shownotes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/52 where you'll find the link to a curated playlist on YouTube that contains a collection of performances on the harp. As you learned in this episode, the harp is used in such a variety of ways for so many different cultures and styles of music, and this playlist will give you a sampling of some of those many styles. Again, you'll find that at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/52.

Thanks so much for joining me today to learn more about the harp, and I look forward to re-connecting with you in 2 weeks on the Busy Kids Love Music podcast. Bye for now!