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Hey there and welcome to a brand new episode of Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music-loving families. My name is Carly Seifert, I'm the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so happy to have you here with me today.

We're finishing up our 4-part series about the 4 major periods of western classical music. We've learned about the Baroque, the Classical and the Romantic period of music history in the past 3 episodes, which I'll place links to in the show notes. The final era – for now – is the one that you and I are currently in. You'll sometimes hear it referred to as the Modern or Contemporary Era of music, or the 20th Century and beyond. These terms all refer to music created from the 1900s onwards.

During this turn of the century, musical styles became more diverse than ever before – and advancements in technology have made it easier for these new creations to reach and influence more people around the world. You might notice that we have so many “-isms” in this era of classical music – we have impressionism, serialism, modernism, minimalism. We also have sub-genres such as jazz, ragtime and blues. And many composers of the present-day continue to be inspired by composers of the past, of course, and might compose music written in a Baroque style or a Romantic style. Composers are still writing operas and symphonies, even though these were forms of music created in the past.

Minimalism – or process music – is music that comes from a, well, process. Sometimes process music is created using traditional instrument and traditional techniques, such as the piece you're listening to now, called “Piano Phase” by Steve Reich. It is written for two pianos and uses a technique he developed called “phasing”. The phasing works of Reich's typically start with two identical lines of music, which the musicians begin playing at the same time. One pianist speeds up and then they come back to playing the same speed, and switch up the original motif a bit, and end in unison.

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This whole phase cycle is repeated 8-60 times during a performance of the piece, and usually lasts about 15-20 minutes.

Towards the end of the 20th century and into our 21st century, film and video game music have become increasingly important. Think about how important the music is to a film the next time you watch a movie. Does it make you feel a certain way? Does it increase the suspense in certain parts of a movie? Does it make an exciting part feel even more exciting? How about when you're playing a video game? Contemporary composers such as John Williams and Hans Zimmer are examples of composers who've written incredibly famous music soundtracks for films.

If there is a theme to sum up the music of the modern era, it might be "Anything Goes". Composers can be rock stars and DJs. Because technology has evolved at such an astonishingly fast pace, we have strange new sounds and synthesizers that can compete with – or participate in – an orchestra. The sky's the limit.

As always, I have loads of resources in this episode's show notes – which you can find at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/81 – to help you continue exploring things that we've learned today about the contemporary period of music. There's a playlist I've put together with some notable music from the modern era, and links to previous episodes we've done on the podcast about specific composers who've written music during this time period. Again you can find all of those resources at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/81.

Thanks so much for joining me for this series on the four major periods of music history. I hope you've enjoyed learning about the many ways music has evolved through the centuries and can better appreciate music's ongoing importance in enriching our culture and lives. I look forward to connecting with you for a brand new episode of Busy Kids Love Music in two weeks. Bye for now!