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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. Today's episode is brought to you by Daily Harvest, which is my favorite, no-fuss way of incorporating nutritious food for my family when we're having a busy day. My kids are big fans of their smoothies and I love zapping their harvest bowls for a quick, healthy lunch. To get \$25 off our first box visit busykidsdopiano.com/harvest, and I'll pop that link in the show notes as well.

Today on the podcast, we're going to learn about a great American pianist, composer and bandleader who wrote thousands of compositions and is considered to be one of the most creative musicians from the 1900s, Duke Ellington.

Edward Kennedy Ellington was born in 1899 in Washington D.C. Both of his parents were musicians. His father, James Edward Ellington, played the piano and sang opera, and also worked as a part-time butler at the White House on several occasions during the 1920s. Duke's mother, Daisy, was a pianist who played parlor songs – music that was typically performed in the parlors of houses before technology like the radio was developed.

At the age of seven, Edward Ellington began piano lessons. It was very important to his mother, Daisy, to surround her son with sophisticated women who would teach him proper manners and elegance. His friends began to call Edward "Duke" because his manners and dapper way of dressing gave him the appearance of a nobleman.

During his childhood, Duke also loved to play baseball. In fact, sometimes President Theodore Roosevelt would ride by on his horse and watch Duke and his friends playing the game. Duke's first job was selling peanuts at baseball games for the team in

Washington D.C.

When Ellington was 14, he started sneaking into a poolroom, where he heard and fell in love with the music of the poolroom pianists and began to focus more on his piano studies, though he confessed in his 1973 autobiography that he missed more piano lessons than he attended because he felt at the time that piano was not his main talent. He was continually exposed to ragtime pianists in Washington D.C., Philadelphia and Atlantic City through his travels as a child, and began to imitate their style. He began to perform professionally at the age of 17 – building his music business through his day job as a freelance sign painter. When customers asked him to make a sign for a dance or party, he would ask them if they had musical entertainment for their event. If they didn't, he would request to play.

Ellington first played in New York City in 1923, and began to put together small groups and ensembles of musicians to perform at Broadway nightclubs and later, at Harlem's Cotton Club. The group of musicians who regularly played with him influenced Ellington's early compositions and style, which came to be known as "jungle style". The piece you're listening to now is called East St. Louis Toodle-Oo, and you can hear multiple themes, key changes and harmonies that are characteristic of his "jungle sound".

As Ellington's popularity grew, so did the size of his band, which allowed him to expand the styles and ways that he composed. He selected musicians for his band that were expressive and creative individuals and important jazz artists themselves. With this talented band, who remained together throughout the 1930s, he made hundreds of recordings, appeared in films and on the radio and toured Europe twice.

He broke traditional rules of writing music for bands by using new harmonies and combining different instruments together to bring out different moods. He also loved to highlight the special talents of his

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musicians by writing solos for them in the middle of the piece. These techniques are all on display in the piece you're listening to now, called "Mood Indigo."

Ellington also was fascinated with the possibility of composing jazz music within classical forms. For example, in 1943 he wrote a musical suite called Black, Brown and Beige, about African-American history. He also created other suites for television productions, impressions of Shakespeare's scenes and characters and a re-orchestrated version of the Nutcracker ballet. Not only that, but he also composed scores for films, ballets and theatres, and towards the end of his life, sacred music, including a jazz Christian liturgy. Can you see why he is considered one of the most creative composers of the 1900s?

As you can see, Ellington composed in a wide variety of styles and genres. He collaborated and recorded with many other legendary jazz and swing musicians and vocalists of his time, such as Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald and John Coltrane. There are many wonderful recordings of Duke Ellington himself playing and leading his bands that you've heard on this episode, and I'd love for you to check out [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/82](https://www.buskidsdopiano.com/podcast/82) to actually view the performances you've heard, as well as some others that weren't in today's episode, in a curated playlist I've put together for you on YouTube. Again you can find that playlist at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/82](https://www.buskidsdopiano.com/podcast/82).

Thanks so much for joining me today to learn about the talents and contributions of the great Duke Ellington. I look forward to connecting with you again in two weeks when the next episode of Busy Kids Love Music airs.

Bye for now!