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Hey there! Welcome to Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music loving families. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm thrilled to have you joining me today as we make musical discoveries together.

In our last episode, we kicked off a brand new, 3-part, composer series about Austrian composer Franz Schubert. We learned about all that he accomplished in his short life, and that his gifts and contributions as a composer weren't really noted until after his death. Today, we're going to listen to and learn about one of Schubert's most famous pieces – and perhaps one of the most recognizable songs in the world – Ave Maria.

“Ave Maria” is the Latin name of the Hail Mary prayer, which is a prayer often used by Roman Catholics, to address Mary, the mother of Jesus, and pray for her intercession. Schubert, however, didn't actually compose his “Ave Maria” piece with the idea that it would be used in any religious capacity, though that is what ended up happening. The text of the music itself is inspired by a famous poem of Sir Walter Scott's called “The Lady of the Lake”. Schubert actually wrote seven songs from this popular narrative poem, and you are listening to the German text – which is what Schubert arranged the music for – in this version.

The heroine of Scott's poem is Ellen Douglas – the Lady of the Lake. She has gone with her exiled father to stay in the Goblin's cave. Another warrior is headed up the mountain with his army to lead the rebellion against King James, and hears the distant sound of a harp accompanying Ellen who is singing a prayer, calling upon the Virgin Mary for help. He pauses to listen to the song before entering battle.

As I mentioned earlier, the text that Schubert originally used by Sir Walter Scott was in German. Translated, the opening lyrics originally said, “Ave Maria! Maiden mild! Listen to a maiden's

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prayer! Thou canst hear through from the wild; Thou canst save amid despair.”

Schubert originally arranged the piece for one singer and one pianist, and the piece was later rearranged into three different piano versions by composer and virtuoso pianist Franz Liszt. Schubert’s setting was first performed at the castle of a countess in a small Austrian town. He dedicated the piece to the countess, which led to her becoming known as “the lady of the lake”.

Because of the opening words and refrain of Ellen’s song, Schubert’s melody was adapted as a setting for the full Latin text of the traditional Roman Catholic prayer, “Ave Maria”. The Latin version is now so often the one that we hear with Schubert’s melody that it led to the misconception that Schubert originally wrote the melody as a setting for the prayer, which was not actually the case. Hear now, the text of the Catholic Hail Mary prayer set to Schubert’s tune:

We learned in the last episode about Schubert that getting his music published during his lifetime was a challenge for him, and that his gifts weren’t appreciated much until after death. “Ave Maria” was an exception however. It was published before his death and considered to be an exquisite piece of music. Though he didn’t have liturgical purposes in mind when he composed it, the piece has become tremendously popular among Roman Catholics and performed by many singers in both religious and secular settings.

If you head over to this episode’s show notes, you can check out full versions of some of the arrangements we listened to today, as well as other performances of this magnificent piece, in the curated playlist I put together for you at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/88. You’ll also find the link to our first episode about composer Franz Schubert, in case you haven’t had a chance to listen to that yet. Again that’s at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/88.

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Thanks so much for joining me today to learn about Franz Schubert's "Ave Maria". In two weeks, our final episode in our series about Franz Schubert will air, and I hope you'll join me then. Bye for now!

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