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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.

We've been working our way through a 3-part series on Austrian composer Franz Schubert. In episode 87, we learned about his life and style of music, and in the last episode, episode 88, we learned about his famous piece, Ave Maria. I'll link to those previous episodes in the show notes in case you need to get caught up. Today, we're finishing up our series with a look at another of Schubert's famous compositions – Der Erlkönig.

Erlkönig – which you'll also hear called Erl-King or Elf King – is a song that Schubert wrote in 1815 based on the poem by the same name, written by Goethe in 1782. The piece is an art song, which were songs typically set to poems and accompanied by the piano that were performed at recitals. Schubert was friends with many singers and wrote around 600 such art songs during his brief life – remember, he only lived into the age of 31 – and Erlkönig is the most famous of them.

Schubert composed his famous art song when he was just 18 years old, and some have claimed that he wrote it in an afternoon. The song was written for two performers – a singer and a pianist. The singer takes on the role of four characters from Goethe's poem – which is based on a Scandinavian folktale. The characters are the narrator, a father, his small son and the "Elking", a powerful and creepy supernatural creature that pursues him. The father can't see or hear the creature and tells the boy that it's only his imagination. The poor child becomes increasingly scared throughout the poem and the Erl-King eventually snatches him.

There is actually a fifth character in Schubert's piece, too – a horse, played by the piano.

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Now that you know the story of the poem, let's listen to a bit of the music again.

Even though you may not be able to understand the words of the singer, can you still picture the scene because of the way that Schubert wrote the music? Can you hear the rapid triplet rhythm played on the piano that sounds like a horse's hooves, galloping through the night? The repeated notes of the piano give the piece a sense of urgency.

Listen now to the singer who, in verse 3, takes on the character of the Erlking. Do you hear a difference in how the singer portrays the Erlking and the way the music changes?

To me, the voice of the Erlking sounds as though he is trying to charm the boy in order to get the boy to come with him. The words he says translate to:

You dear child, come, go with me!  
Very lovely games I'll play with you;  
Some colorful flowers are on the beach,  
My mother has some golden robes.”

That Erlking sure is tricky, isn't he?

Schubert's piece premiered successfully in 1821. Critics called the work “a masterpiece of musical painting”. No other performance of Schubert's work received quite as much attention during his lifetime as Erlkönig did.

The piece of Schubert's is still quite popular and regarded as challenging to perform – think of all the different characters the vocalist has to portray as he sings! The piano accompaniment has rapid, repeated chords and octaves that make it challenging to play as well.

If you head over to this episode's show notes, I've linked to a full performance of this dramatic, 4-minute piece by Franz Schubert so that

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you can listen to it in its entirety. You can find the link to that performance at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/89](https://www.busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/89). As I mentioned earlier, I'll also include links to the other episodes in our series about Franz Schubert, if you want to catch up on those. Again, you can find all that at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/89](https://www.busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/89).