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Hey there, and welcome to episode 94 of Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music loving families. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm delighted to have you joining me today.

This month, the month of April, is Broadway Month here in the Busy Kids Do Piano community, so we've been doing some fun things this month that center on learning about all-things Broadway. Going with that theme, today on the podcast, we're going to learn what it means to be a Broadway show and a little bit about the history of Broadway.

Let's start by talking about what we mean when we talk about Broadway theater. Together with London's West End, Broadway is generally considered the highest form of theatre entertainment in the English-speaking world. And while a Broadway show is typically a play or a musical, sometimes there will be concerts or other special live events that are part of Broadway, too. Broadway is a 13 mile street that runs through two of New York City's five boroughs – Manhattan and the Bronx. The strict, technical definition of a Broadway theatre is any venue with 500 seats or more located along Broadway within New York City's Theatre District – which technically includes 41 theatres that are Broadway venues. The word "Broadway" evolved to mean something more than just this specific, famous street in New York City, so let's dig into the history of how that happened.

The first theaters in New York City were built in the 1700s, and often performed plays by William Shakespeare. Broadway emerged as an important theater district in the mid-1800s, and the area developed into a fashionable, central hub for entertainers. The show Black Crook in 1866 is considered to be one of the first Broadway musicals. It was five and a half hours long and ran for 474 performances – a record for the time.

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Musicals became popular, and in the mid 1890's and early 1900s, variety shows and vaudeville performances were performed. These types of shows had a combination of acts, and would include singing and dancing as well as things like jugglers, trained animals, magicians and comedians. White lightbulbs on the theater signs advertising the shows created a street that was brilliantly lit and came to be nicknamed "the Great White Way." New playwrights debuted plays on Broadway in the 1920s, and classical revivals of Shakespeare's work were popular as well

The Great Depression and the competition with motion pictures slowed the growth of Broadway, but as they say in the theatre, "the show must go on." And go on it did! As the economy rebounded from the Depression, so did Broadway performances, and writers began to focus on tying together all aspects of musical theater. They would create an interesting plot with songs and dances that would captivate the viewer's interest while also being important to furthering the plot of the story. Shows such as Anything Goes by Cole Porter and Oklahoma by the famous duo Rodgers and Hammerstein became hits and enjoyed long theatrical runs. Plays and musicals also began to address current events. There were many writers and composers that emerged during this time, considered to be the Golden Age of Broadway – every season had new stage musicals and songs that topped the charts. Many musicals from this time are still performed today – think of shows such as Sound of Music and West Side Story that have been made into films and continue to enjoy staged performances and revivals throughout the world.

Things changed again for Broadway in the late 1960s. The area of Broadway declined and the number of shows produced began to drop, with only 36 theaters left of the 70-80 theaters that had existed in the 1920s. In early 1982, Joe Papp, a producer and director, led the "Save the Theatres" campaign. He attempted to pass legislation that would designate Broadway/Times Square Theatre District as a national historic site and designate the theatres as landmarks. While not all of these bills passed, the group did draw national attention to the issues plaguing Broadway and helped provide resources to support actors and technical crews. Around this time, the phenomenon of the megamusical

began with the production of the 1981 musical composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber, Cats.

Megamusicals are musicals on a grand scale – the scores are grand, the set and costumes extravagant, the cast is large and there tends to be complex technology involved with the statecraft. These musicals have huge budgets and are marketed heavily. Les Miserables, Phantom of the Opera and Miss Saigon are examples from the 1980s of megamusicals, and musicals such as Lion King and Wicked are examples that have been created since.

Disney has brought many of its movies to the stage since debuting Beauty and the Beast on Broadway in 1994. It signed a 49-year lease for the New Amsterdam Theatre on Broadway, and then extensively renovated the venue before premiering The Lion King in 1997. This theater was in such bad shape that there were mushrooms growing on the ground, so Disney's investment gave the theater new life. Disney musicals on Broadway have helped grow audiences, press and people from around the world who are interested in Broadway with millions of tourists and locals attending performances of Disney Theatrical productions. It's also led to an era of a safer-and-cleaned-up Times Square. I have a special bonus for you if you head to this episode's show notes at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/94](http://busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/94) where I'm sharing all my piano lesson tutorials that feature songs from Broadway musicals – many of which are also Disney movies. Again that's at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/94](http://busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/94).

If you've ever seen a Broadway musical – perhaps on Broadway itself, or a touring show that originated on Broadway, or maybe a Broadway performance that was filmed – then you might know that there are a lot of people involved in the production of a Broadway musical. There's the production team – which oversees all the business of putting on a musical, there's the director, who is in charge of what happens onstage, there's the set designers who design and build the sets you see and the choreographers who design and create the dances. Of course there's all

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the actors onstage and the lighting designers who make sure we can see the actors onstage and the sound designers who make sure we can hear them. There's so many important roles involved in making a show, and in the next episode of Busy Kids Love Music, we're going to learn about the role of a Music Director, who conducts the rehearsals and performances of a Broadway show. I'm going to sit down with Meg Zervoulis, who is a music director on Broadway, and let her tell you more about what the role of a music director involves and some of the challenges and excitement that are part of her job.

I hope you'll join me for that episode which will air in two weeks as our Broadway month continues. Thanks so much for joining me today, and I look forward to connecting with you again soon. Bye for now!