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Hey! Welcome to 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 excited to have you joining me today as we make musical discoveries together.

In our last episode of Busy Kids Love Music, we learned about the life and musical style of Russian composer, pianist and conductor Sergei Rachmaninoff. If you didn't yet get the chance to check out that episode, be sure to give it a listen at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/96. In that episode, we learned that Rachmaninoff composed in a Romantic style and, being one of the most skilled pianists of his time, often featured the piano in his compositions. Today we're going to take a closer look at his collection of preludes for the solo piano.

Rachmaninoff's most important works for the piano are typically considered to be his 24 preludes that cover all 24 major and minor keys. They weren't published as one unified set, but were published at different times throughout 20 years of the composer's life. These preludes were intended to be piano showpieces for a virtuoso pianist. Do you remember what it means to be a virtuoso? It means that you're a very skilled musician. Can you tell as you hear bits and pieces of these preludes that they are difficult to play and require a lot of technical skill?

In 1892, Rachmaninoff published a set of five piano pieces, all with different titles. The second in this collection was the Prelude in C# minor, which is perhaps his most well-known of his works and is the one you're listening to right now. Because it was so popular during his lifetime, Rachmaninoff grew tired of the piece and gave it the nickname "Frankenstein" because he felt it was overplayed. Audiences would demand it as an encore at his performances, and he actually once said, "Many, many times I wish I had never written it." It has been used in films and arranged for orchestras. The piece is also known as The Bells of Moscow because the introduction imitated the sounds of the Kremlin's solemn chimes.

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After the C# minor Prelude, the G minor Prelude comes in second as one of the more commonly played in Rachmaninoff's preludes.

Rachmaninoff himself had unusually large hands, and his piano preludes – including the G minor Prelude – had frequently appearing six and eight-note chords that spanned many notes across the two hands and can be demanding for pianists to learn. While his C# minor prelude opened with the sounds of bells, his G minor prelude opens with a march theme, and in the middle, a B section contrasts the march with a beautiful, lyrical melody before returning to the march theme and ending with a short and soft run up the keys of the piano.

While Rachmaninoff didn't originally seem to set out with the goal of composing preludes that cover all 24 major and minor keys, by 1910, after publishing 11 preludes in different keys, he decided to complete the set of 24 by publishing 13 more preludes to complete the remaining 13 keys. Phew!

His 24 published preludes have been recorded as a unified set of 24 by famous and talented pianists, but Rachmaninoff himself never performed more than four of his preludes in any single concert. Rachmaninoff did record much of his own music, but only recorded eight of his 24 preludes. We've sampled three of his preludes in today's episode, but if you head to this episode's show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/97, you'll find a link to a curated playlist on YouTube where I'll be sharing recordings to more of his preludes for you to hear.

In our next episode of Busy Kids Love Music, which airs in 2 weeks, we'll be starting our 3rd annual summer series of Around the World with Busy Kids Love Music, where we travel the world learning about folk music from different countries and collecting stamps for our passports as we go. I hope you'll join me for that and I look forward to connecting with you then. Bye for now!