



# Remarkable Romantics

MSO Schools Concert  
Learning Resource

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## Remarkable Romantics

In this MSO Schools concert you'll hear music from two composers, Glinka and Brahms. They both lived in the 19th century, during the Romantic era.

The Romantic era followed the Classical era (1750–1800) in music history. While Classical music was all about following strict rules for how a piece should be structured, Romantic composers liked to break the rules!

Romantic music is full of feeling, with composers capturing their emotions in their work. They also started to use larger and larger orchestras and often liked to write music that told a story.

## Reference recordings

This Learning Resource refers to the following performances on YouTube:

GLINKA Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QW3lwWFkpfC>

Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, conducted by Benjamin Zander at Symphony Hall, Boston (2 November 2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhPkutM-ldc>

Hallé Orchestra, conducted by Mark Elder at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester (June 2021)

BRAHMS Symphony No. 1

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_xjkPKi\\_eI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_xjkPKi_eI)

Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Hartmut Haenchen at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw (28 November 2020)

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 9: 4th movement (Ode to Joy)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cep8Ru4TL4k>

Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, Bremen conducted by Paavo Järvi at the Beethovenhalle, Bonn (2009 Beethovenfest)

## Meet the Composers

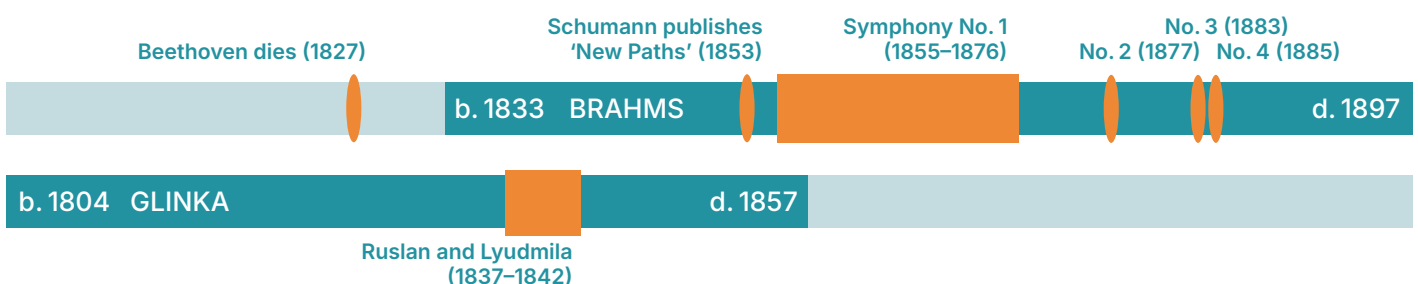
### Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka (1804–1857)

Mikhail Glinka was born into a rich, noble family in Russia and fell in love with music at a young age. In the 19th century, all classical music came from Europe, and Mikhail travelled to Italy and Germany to study composing, but after a few years he realised that he wanted to go back home and write Russian music instead.

Glinka wrote two great operas: *A Life for the Tsar* (1836) and *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842). They were based on Russian stories, were sung in Russian, and used melodies from Russian folk songs in the music. After writing *A Life for the Tsar*, Glinka received a reward of a ring worth 4,000 roubles from Tsar Nicholas I. (This would have been approximately 14 times the average annual salary of a railway clerk at the time.)



Portrait by Ilya Repin, made 30 years after Glinka's death. In this painting, Repin imagined Glinka at work, composing *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. (Wikimedia Commons)



# Meet the Composers

## Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, which is now part of Germany, in 1833. His father was a musician who played lots of instruments, and soon young Johannes was following in his footsteps – he could play the cello, horn and piano. When he was six years old, he invented his own system for writing music down, and by the age of ten he was performing in public on the piano.

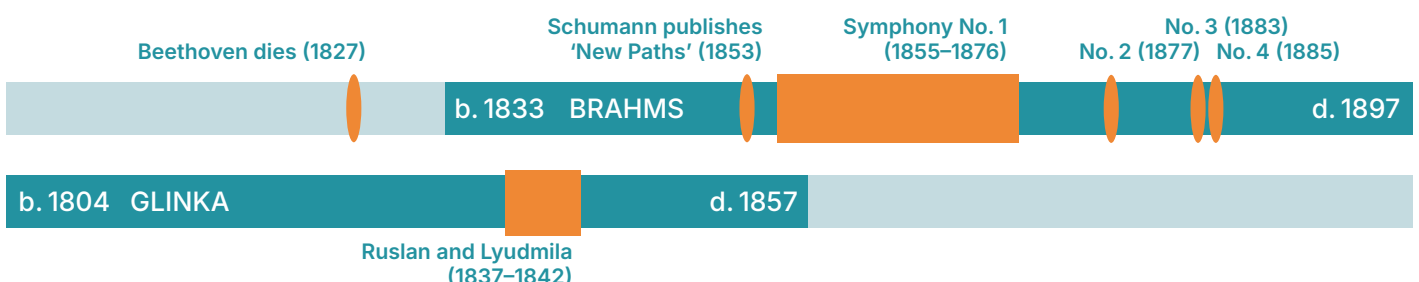
When he grew up, Brahms worked as a pianist, conductor and composer. He once travelled around Hungary with a friend who played the violin, accompanying him on the piano during his concerts. Here, Brahms was inspired by the folk music he heard, and when he arrived home, he composed 21 Hungarian dances for piano. The most famous of these is Hungarian Dance No. 5.

When Brahms was just 20 years old, the influential composer Robert Schumann wrote an article, 'New Paths', in which he named Brahms as a second Beethoven and the next great composer of symphonies. But Brahms didn't like the pressure of being compared to his hero and he told one of his friends: 'I shall never write a symphony! You have no idea how it makes one feel to hear the thunderous step of a giant like him always behind you!'

So it's not surprising that Brahms took a very long time to complete his first symphony. In the end, though, he wrote four great symphonies, as well as many other types of compositions. You may have heard one of his most famous songs, his *Wiegenlied* (or 'Lullaby' in English).



Photograph of Brahms, taken in 1875, one year before he finished his Symphony No. 1 (Brahms-Institut, Lübeck)



## Meet the Music

### GLINKA Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842)

*Ruslan and Lyudmila* is an opera written by Mikhail Glinka. An opera is like a play, complete with costumes and scenery, but it is set entirely to music and all the lines are sung. However, you won't hear any singing when you come to hear the MSO perform; they will be playing the Overture, which is the introduction to the opera and only uses instruments.

The story of the opera is set in Kyiv in medieval times. In Act I, the princess Lyudmila (sometimes spelled Ludmila) is abducted by monsters, just as she is about to marry Ruslan. The remaining four acts follow the magical adventures of Ruslan as he searches for her.

Glinka began writing *Ruslan and Lyudmila* in 1837 and it was first performed in St Petersburg, Russia, in 1842. Audiences weren't very impressed at first because they preferred Italian opera, but soon they came to love their very own Russian version!

The Overture is fast and energetic, interspersed with a few lyrical moments. It is quite a short piece, lasting only five minutes.

The instruments used in this work are:

Strings	Woodwind	Brass	Percussion
1st Violins 2nd Violins Violas Cellos Double Basses	2 Flutes 2 Oboes 2 Clarinets 2 Bassoons Contrabassoon	4 French Horns 2 Trumpets 3 Trombones	Timpani (3 drums)

## Meet the Music

### BRAHMS Symphony No.1 in C minor, Op.68 (1876)

A symphony is a long piece of music written for orchestra and containing multiple sections called movements. Like most symphonies of the time, Brahms's Symphony No.1 is made up of four movements, each with different moods and tempos:

- I. Un poco sostenuto – Allegro
- II. Andante sostenuto
- III. Un poco allegretto e grazioso
- IV. Adagio – Più andante – Allegro non troppo, ma con brio – Più allegro

Before the Romantic era, composers always followed strict rules when writing a symphony, and audiences knew what to expect when they listened to one. By Brahms's time, however, the rules were starting to be bent and even broken as composers focused more on expressing feelings or telling stories with their music than the strict conventions of the past. Brahms was no exception: his Symphony No. 1 is full of music that makes the audience feel different emotions, from strong, stormy themes to sweet, lyrical melodies. He also wasn't afraid to break the rules; for example, while Classical composers always repeated their main musical ideas, Brahms preferred to constantly develop them into new ones.

The symphony was completed and first performed in 1876, but the first sketches date from around 1855 and Brahms said the symphony took him more than 14 years to write. (See timeline on page 5.)

Brahms was inspired by his hero Ludwig van Beethoven when writing his first symphony. Some listeners pointed out that the main theme from the 4th movement sounded a lot like the 'Ode to Joy' theme from the 4th movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, and Brahms replied, 'Any donkey can see that!'

When played from beginning to end, Symphony No. 1 lasts for about 45 minutes.

The instruments used in this work are:

Strings	Woodwind	Brass	Percussion
1st Violins 2nd Violins Violas Cellos Double Basses	2 Flutes 2 Oboes 2 Clarinets 2 Bassoons Contrabassoon	4 French Horns 2 Trumpets 3 Trombones	Timpani (2 drums)

## Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila* Listen and Respond

### ACTIVITY 1: LISTEN AND MOVE

In this activity, students will become familiar with the main musical ideas in Glinka's Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila* through movement and actions.

There are two main themes in the Overture, played here by the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QW3lwWfKpfc>

First Theme or Scurrying Theme, played by the violins  
(looped clip: [0:19–0:37](#))

Second Theme or Imagination Theme, played by the cellos  
(looped clip: [1:06–1:17](#))

#### Younger students:

1. Listen to the Scurrying Theme by itself. This theme features passages of extremely fast notes on the violin. When they hear this theme, your students should run as fast as they can on the spot!
2. Listen to the Imagination Theme. This theme features long notes and a warm, lyrical melody on the cello. When they hear this theme, your students should stand with their feet still, stretch out their arms gracefully, and look up as though they are imagining something beautiful.
3. When the students can recognise both themes they should listen to the whole piece, keeping an ear out for the two themes and doing the correct actions when they hear them! Listen carefully, as sometimes the themes appear in different instruments when they come back.

#### Older students:

1. Listen to the two themes without showing students the screen. Have the students identify some differences between the two themes (e.g. short vs long notes, many instruments vs a few instruments, loud vs soft, etc.)
2. Watch the two themes on the video. Notice how the conductor moves differently during the two themes to achieve the contrasting sound you identified earlier.
3. Now it is your students' turn to be the conductor! As they listen to the two themes again, they should use their bodies to show differences between them. (They might copy the conductor from the video or create their own movements.)
4. Finally, listen to the whole piece. Have the students 'conduct' the whole time, matching their movements to what they hear and listening carefully for the two familiar themes.

### ACTIVITY 2: LISTEN AND IMAGINE

Listen to the Overture, played here by the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QW3lwWfKpfc>

As you listen, imagine what the opera might be about based on what you hear. What scenes, characters or settings can you 'see' in your mind's eye as you listen?

- Brainstorm some ideas as a class. (Older students can describe the music they heard that made them think of their scene, character or setting.)
- Draw a picture, create a comic strip, or write a short story to tell your version of the story.

### Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila* Take it Further

#### ACTIVITY 3: CUTLERY COMPOSITION

In this activity, students will compose and notate a piece of music using plates and cutlery. For safety, you might choose to use spoons only and forego knives and forks. It is also fine to use plastic or paper implements if needed – the sounds will be different, but they will be able to create something just as interesting! This activity can be done in small groups, or as a whole class.

Glinka said he was inspired to write his Overture after attending a wedding feast at the Russian court: 'I was up in the balcony, and the clattering of knives, forks and plates made such an impression on me that I had the idea to imitate them in the prelude to *Ruslan*.'

1. Experiment with the different sounds you can create with your items.
2. Choose four of your favourite sounds and note them down (e.g. tap fork on edge of plate, open side of spoon on table)
3. Create a symbol for each sound (e.g. a spoon on the table might be an oval inside a square).
4. Using a 4x4 grid like the one on the activity sheet at the end of this resource, fill in each square with 1, 2 or 4 symbols, making sure to use all four sound symbols at some point in your grid. You might also like to leave one or two squares blank. (Note: start by using only one kind of symbol per square, i.e. four spoon-on-tables; if that's too easy, you might like to mix it up later!)
5. Each square of the grid is one beat, so one symbol in a square is a ta/crotchet, two symbols are a ti-ti/quavers, four symbols are tika-tika/semiquavers and a blank square is a zaa/rest. Practice playing your composition using your chosen sounds, making sure everyone in the group has a sound to make. (Note: these steps could be adapted to include any rhythmic patterns with which the students are familiar with or exclude those they haven't encountered yet.)
6. When you can play your composition confidently, try playing it for another group, for the class, or making a recording or video of your performance.

#### Extension ideas:

- Lengthen your composition to 32 beats.
- Find ways to notate other rhythmic patterns you know, e.g. tim-ka, ta-aa/minims, etc.
- Include other objects from the classroom in your composition.
- Try composing a piece for one person to perform alone.
- Record your chosen sounds in isolation, upload them to audio manipulation software (e.g. Audacity) or a DAW (Digital Audio Workstation, e.g. GarageBand) and compose a piece of music using the recorded sounds.

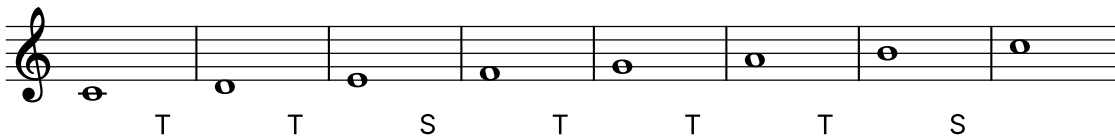
## Classroom Activities

### ACTIVITY 4: WHOLE-TONE SCALES

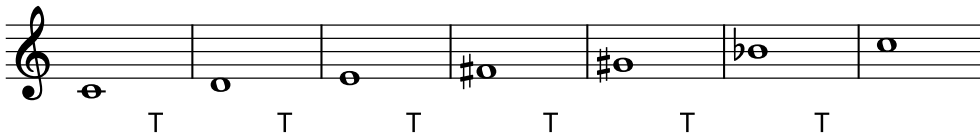
This activity is designed for **older students** who are familiar with some theory concepts and can identify a major scale.

In *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, Glinka used a special scale called a **whole-tone scale** to represent Chernomor, an evil wizard.

- Most scales use a combination of tones and semitones to create a particular sound.
- You're probably familiar with a **major scale**, which some people say sounds happy. It looks like this:



- The **whole-tone scale** only uses tones and there are no semitones. This makes it sound quite strange! It looks like this:



Russian composers such as Glinka, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Igor Stravinsky used different scales to distinguish between supernatural and human characters in their operas and ballets: music for human characters would be written using familiar major and minor scales; music for supernatural or magical characters would use unusual scales such as chromatic, whole-tone and octatonic (eight-note) scales.\*

1. Play the whole-tone scale for your students, both ascending and descending. Have them identify the notes in the scale that sound strange or unexpected.
2. Compare the whole-tone scale with the major scale. Which notes are different? Are there other differences between the two scales?
3. If chromatic instruments are available, learn to play the whole-tone scale.

In Glinka's Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, the whole-tone scale is played by the trombones as a descending scale, beginning on the note D. It's heard twice in the final minute.

4. Watch the following performance by the Hallé Orchestra and conductor Mark Elder, paying attention to the trombones:  
<https://youtu.be/NhPkutM-ldc?si=FKmYLUFwstQc7hWH&t=297>  
(link starts at 4:57)
5. Discuss why Glinka might have chosen the whole-tone scale to represent a magical or supernatural character such as a wizard.

\* Refer to Lesson 4 from [MSO 2025 School Learning Resource, Wizardry School](#) (Stravinsky's Firebird)



Design for an 1870 production of *Ruslan and Lyudmila* showing Chernomor being carried on the back of a tortoise (Design by Viktor Hartmann, who inspired Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*)

### BRAHMS Symphony No.1 Introduction to Brahms and his orchestra

#### ACTIVITY 5: COMPOSER PROFILE

Imagine you are a newspaper reporter, and you have just seen a performance of Brahms's music. Write an article about Brahms and the music you heard. You can research Brahms using your school library or the links below. Make sure you include the following information:

- Name, date and place of birth
- Education (where he went to school, where he studied music)
- A description of his music
- Some of his most famous compositions
- Any other important skills or experience he had

#### Links:

- Kids encyclopaedia: <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Johannes-Brahms/273323>
- Biography and podcasts: <https://www.classicsforkids.com/composer/johannes-brahms/>
- Biography video (Classics for Kids): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_L93v6AIsM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_L93v6AIsM)

#### ACTIVITY 6: BRAHMS'S ORCHESTRA

Orchestral instruments are categorised by the way they create sound.

- The **string** family uses plucked strings, or a bow is dragged across the strings.
- The **woodwind** family uses air blown across a mouthpiece (flute) or through a reed (oboe, bassoon, clarinet, saxophone).
- The **brass** family also uses blown air, but players buzz their lips to create the sound. This video from the MSO has a great demonstration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6F9RoxlwB2s>
- The **percussion** family instruments are scraped, shaken or hit.

1. Explore the instruments of the orchestra using MSO Learn (<https://www.msoslearn.com.au/>), discovering the different instrument families, what each instrument sounds like, how they make their sound, and where they sit within the orchestra.
2. Not every piece of orchestral music uses every available instrument; composers have also tended to use larger orchestras over time.

Compare the instruments Brahms wrote for in his Symphony No. 1 to those on MSO Learn – which ones will you see and hear when you visit the MSO? Are there any instruments that Brahms used that you can't hear on MSO Learn? How could you find out more about them?

3. Invent your own instrument and figure out which family it belongs to!
  - Draw a picture of the instrument you invented.
  - Describe how the instrument would be played.
  - Describe what the instrument would sound like.
  - Which instrument family would it belong to? Why?

## Classroom Activities

### BRAHMS Symphony No.1 Play, Listen and Respond

#### ACTIVITY 7: SING AND PLAY

The 4th movement of Brahms's Symphony No. 1 features a melody we'll call the Main Theme. It first appears at 32:51, played by the strings.

Looped clip: [32:51-33:27](#)

#### Instruments

Learn to play the beginning of the Main Theme. It can work well on recorder and tuned percussion, depending on the key:

*C major (original key) – tuned percussion*



*G major – recorder*



#### Singing – younger students:

For younger students, or if instruments are not available, learn to sing the beginning of the Main Theme melody:



#### Singing – older students:

If your students are familiar with solfa, learn the beginning of the Main Theme in solfa using hand signs.



# Classroom Activities

## ACTIVITY 8: LISTEN AND CREATE

Listen the following excerpts from the 1st movement of Brahms's Symphony No. 1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_xjkPKi\\_el](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_xjkPKi_el)

- a) [0:08–0:46](#)
- b) [2:19–2:53](#)
- c) [3:00–3:38](#)
- d) [7:14–7:50](#)
- e) [13:40–14:04](#)

1. For each excerpt, brainstorm some words to describe the mood that Brahms has created.
2. Discuss some reasons why the music evokes this mood. Use words like loud/soft, high/low, long/short, fast/slow, etc.
3. For one or two of the excerpts, have the students create a piece of art that represents what they hear. Their artwork could depict a scene, an object/group of objects, or abstract lines, shapes and colours.

### Extension:

Choose a mood word from the brainstorming activity. Think about how that mood could sound. Just like Brahms, compose a piece of music that depicts your chosen mood using objects in your classroom, body percussion, instruments you have available, or music software.

(This activity could be done individually, in pairs or groups, or as a whole class.)

## Classroom Activities

### ACTIVITY 9: LISTEN AND IDENTIFY

Once students are familiar with the sounds of the different instrument families, listen to the following excerpt from the slow introduction (*Adagio*) of the 4th movement of Symphony No.1 and practice identifying the string, woodwind and brass families:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_xjkPKi\\_el&t=1686s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_xjkPKi_el&t=1686s)

1. Listen to these three excerpts from the 4th movement without looking at the video. See if the students can hear which family is playing in each one. Let them look at the video to see if they were right.

- a) [30:48–31:19](#) – Alpine theme, brass
- b) [32:51–33:08](#) – Main theme, strings
- c) [33:25–33:40](#) – Main theme, woodwinds

#### Extension:

- d) [37:56–38:12](#) – Main theme, whole orchestra (unfortunately not visible in the video)
2. Watch excerpts b), c) and d) again. These all feature the same melody but use different combinations of instruments. Discuss the effect on the music of using different instruments to play the same music. What differences did Brahms create in the sound?

### ACTIVITY 10: LISTEN AND COMPARE (EXTENSION ACTIVITY)

We know that Brahms was inspired by Beethoven when writing his Symphony No. 1. Listen to these two excerpts and compare the way Beethoven and Brahms developed simple melodies into inspirational moments of music.

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 9: 4th movement ('Ode to Joy')

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cep8Ru4TL4k&t=158s>  
(2:38–5:11)

BRAHMS Symphony No. 1:

4th movement (Allegro non troppo, ma con brio)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_xjkPKi\\_el&t=1971s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_xjkPKi_el&t=1971s)  
(32:51–34:08)

1. Listen to both excerpts, noting the way both feature a simple melody repeated several times, building from a small group of instruments to the whole orchestra.
2. As a class, analyse both excerpts. Focus on the way each repetition of the melody varies from the one before, thinking about instrumentation, texture, accompaniment, and dynamics.
3. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two.  
In what ways was Brahms inspired by Beethoven when writing his version of this idea?

## During the concert

Students can consider the following questions while watching the performance:

- How do the different movements made by the conductor affect the sound created by the orchestra?
- What might happen if there were no conductor? How would the orchestra sound?
- Choose your favourite instrument from the orchestra. Why is it your favourite? How does that instrument add to the whole sound the orchestra creates?
- Notice that the instruments in the orchestra come in a range of sizes, from very big to very small and everything in between. How does an instrument's size affect the sound it makes?

## After the concert

- Discuss your answers to the questions above.
- Revisit the Sing and Play and/or Listen and Move activities.
- Find and play a Kahoot quiz about the Instruments of the Orchestra.
- Imagine you are Brahms and your Symphony No.1 is about to be played for the very first time. How do you feel?  
Write a short story about that day.

# Cutlery Composition

1. Experiment with the different sounds you can create with your items.
2. Choose four of your favourite sounds and note them below.
3. Create a symbol for each sound.
4. Using the grid, fill in each square with 1, 2 or 4 symbols, making sure to use all four sound symbols at some point in your grid. You might also like to leave one or two squares blank. (Start by using only one kind of symbol per square; you might like to mix it up later.)
5. Practise playing your composition using your chosen sounds, making sure everyone in the group has a sound to make.
6. When you can play your composition confidently, try playing it for another group or for the class, or making a recording or video of your performance.

SOUND

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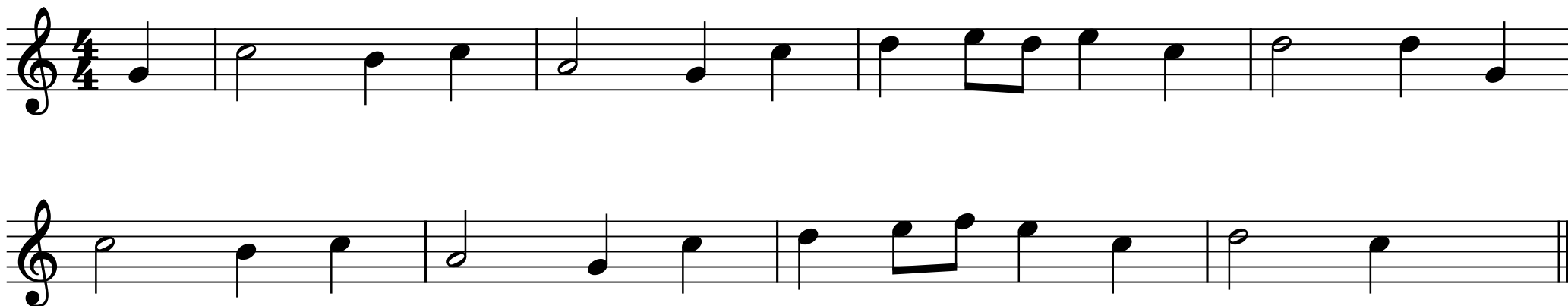
SYMBOL


Each square of the grid is one beat, so:  
 1 symbol in a square is a ta/crotchet  
 2 symbols are ti-ti/quavers  
 4 symbols are tika-tika/semiquavers  
 and a blank square is a zaa/rest

## Sing and Play

### BRAHMS Symphony No.1: 4th movement

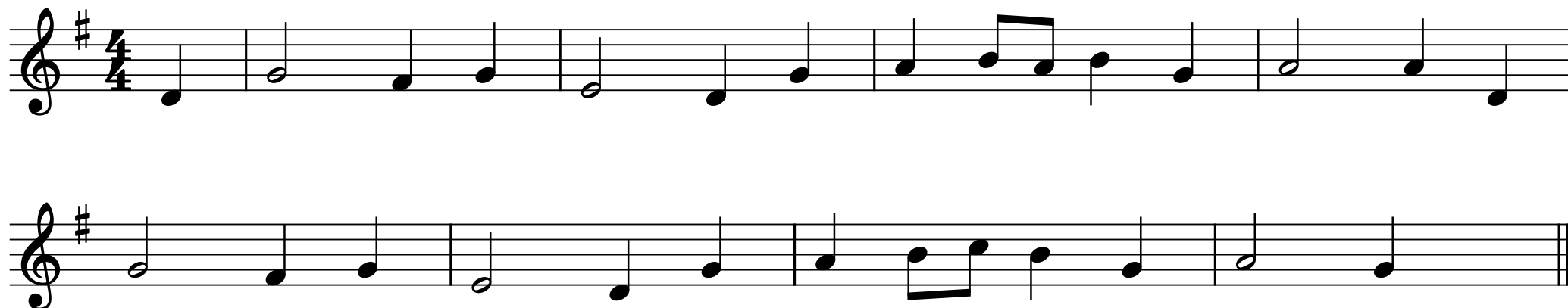
MAIN THEME (C MAJOR, ORIGINAL KEY, FOR TUNED PERCUSSION)



## Sing and Play

### BRAHMS Symphony No.1: 4th movement

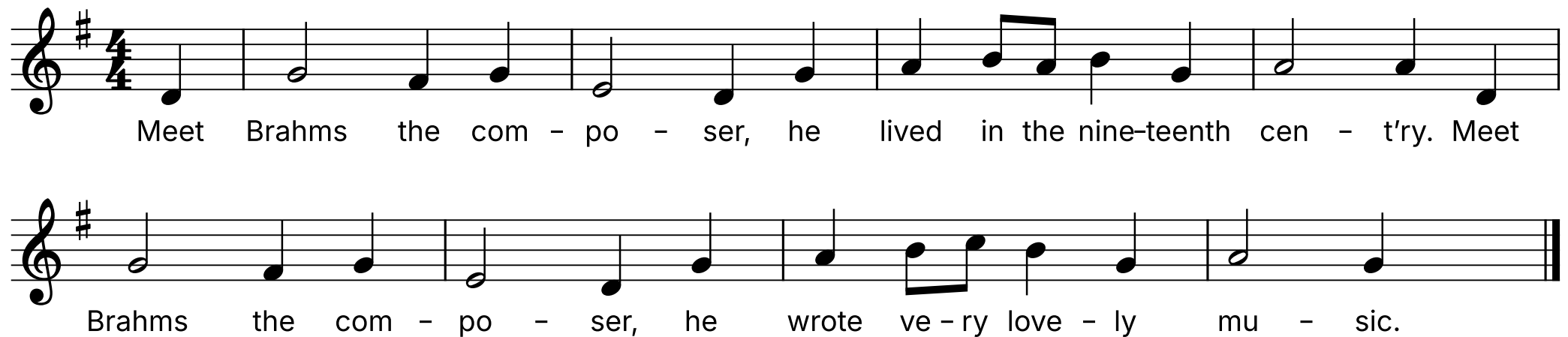
MAIN THEME (G MAJOR, FOR SOPRANO/DESCANT RECORDER)



## Sing and Play

### BRAHMS Symphony No.1: 4th movement

#### MAIN THEME FOR SINGING



Meet Brahms the com - po - ser, he lived in the nine-teenth cen - t'ry. Meet

Brahms the com - po - ser, he wrote ve - ry love - ly mu - sic.

## Sing and Play

### BRAHMS Symphony No.1: 4th movement

#### MAIN THEME FOR SINGING, WITH SOLFA

The image displays two staves of musical notation for the main theme of Brahms' Symphony No. 1, 4th movement. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written on a single staff with a treble clef. The notes are accompanied by solfa syllables: s, d, t, d, l, s, d, r, m, r, m, d, r, r, s, d, t, d, l, s, d, r, m, f, m, d, r, d. The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests. The first staff ends with a double bar line, and the second staff continues the melody and also ends with a double bar line.