# Introduction to Braille Music (Music Braille)

Braille music was invented by Louis Braille, and uses the same six-dot cells. It basically reassigns the various dot combinations to musical meanings. Braille music gives opportunities to study musical scores and independence to learning. As a blind musician, apart from when singing, most music needs to be memorised and braille music can be a valuable tool.

Braille music can be used for simple tunes for a solo instrument, right through to choral pieces, piano works and even orchestral scores.

Note: in this document, there are examples of braille which may not read well with speech on screen readers; descriptions are given above the braille. If you have a braille display, you will be able to read the braille directly. Some knowledge of grade 2 (contracted) braille is assumed).

## Basic Notes

Crotchet (quarter) notes from C to B:

TH, WH, ED, ER, OU, OW, W

⠹ ⠱ ⠫ ⠻ ⠳ ⠪ ⠺

Crotchet (quarter) rest: V ⠧

Unlike print music, to show the pitch of a note, braille uses octave signs. Octaves run from C to B. There are seven octaves, starting at the bottom C on a conventional piano. "Middle C" is fourth octave C.

4th octave sign: dot 5 ⠐

Music is normally shown in "bars" or "measures". In print each bar is indicated with a "bar line". In braille, this is a space.

Often there are four crotchet beats in a bar, called 4/4 time.

Four/four time: number, D, lower D ⠼⠙⠲

A double bar shows the end of the music.

Double bar: GH, K ⠣⠅

## Example 1

Number, D, lower D, space, Dot 5, ED, WH, TH, WH, space, ED, ED, ED, V, space, WH, WH, WH, V, space, ED, OU, OU, V,

⠼⠙⠲⠀⠐⠫⠱⠹⠱⠀⠫⠫⠫⠧⠀⠱⠱⠱⠧⠀⠫⠳⠳⠧

## More Notes

Minims (half notes) last two crotchet beats. Minims C to B:

N, O, P, Q, R, S, T

⠝ ⠕ ⠏ ⠟ ⠗ ⠎ ⠞

Minim (half) rest: U ⠥

## Example 2

Number, D, lower D, space, Dot 5, TH, TH, OU, OU, space, OW, OW, R, space, ER, ER, ED, ED, space, WH, WH, N

⠼⠙⠲⠀⠐⠹⠹⠳⠳⠀⠪⠪⠗⠀⠻⠻⠫⠫⠀⠱⠱⠝

Can you complete the tune? Don't forget the double bar at the end.

Last bar: WH, WH, N, GH, K

⠱⠱⠝⠣⠅

## Even more notes

Semibreves (whole notes) last four beats. Semibreves C to B:

Y, Z, AND, FOR, OF, THE, WITH

⠽ ⠵ ⠯ ⠿ ⠷ ⠮ ⠾

Semibreve (whole) rest: M ⠍

For a dotted note, add dot 3 ⠄ after the note.

C dotted minim (half note): N, Dot 3 ⠝⠄

## Example 3

Number, D, Lower D, space, V, Dot 5, TH, ED, ER, space, OF, space, V, TH, ED, ER, space, OF, space

⠼⠙⠲⠀⠧⠐⠹⠫⠻⠀⠷⠀⠧⠹⠫⠻⠀⠷⠀

V, Dot 5, TH, ED, ER, space, R, P, space, N, P, space, Z

⠧⠐⠹⠫⠻⠀⠗⠏⠀⠝⠏⠀⠵

V, Dot 5, ED, ED, WH, space, Y, space, P, R, space, OU, Q, Dot 3

⠧⠐⠫⠫⠱⠀⠽⠀⠏⠗⠀⠳⠟⠄

Can you complete this tune?

## Vocal Music

For vocal music, you have a line of words followed by an indented line of music; then the next line of words and another indented line of music.

So the beginning of the previous example would look like this:

O when the saints go marching in,

V, Dot 5, TH, ED, ER, space, OF, etc

O when the saints go marching in,

V, Dot 5, TH, ED, ER, space, R, P, space, N, P, space, Z

⠠⠕⠀⠱⠢⠀⠮⠀⠎⠁⠔⠞⠎⠀⠛⠀⠍⠜⠡⠬⠀⠊⠝⠂

⠀⠀⠧⠐⠹⠫⠻⠀⠷⠀⠧⠹⠫⠻⠀⠷⠀

⠠⠕⠀⠱⠢⠀⠮⠀⠎⠁⠔⠞⠎⠀⠛⠀⠍⠜⠡⠬⠀⠊⠝⠂

⠀⠀⠧⠐⠹⠫⠻⠀⠗⠏⠀⠝⠏⠀⠵

## Piano Music

There are a couple of different ways piano music is laid out, but the modern way is called "Bar-over-bar". The top line shows the right hand and underneath is the left hand, a bit like print. Down the left are the bar numbers.

Here is the beginning of the second example as simple piano music:

Line 1: A, space, Dot 46, AR, Dot 5, TH, TH, OU, OU, space, OW, OW, R

Line 2: 2 spaces, Dot 456, AR, Dot 456, N, P, 3 spaces, ER, TH, ED, TH

Line 3: C, space, Dot 46, AR, Dot 5, ER, ER, ED, ED, space, WH, WH, N

Line 4: 2 spaces, Dot 456, AR, Dot 456, WH, OU, TH, OU, space, ER, OU, P

⠁⠀⠨⠜⠐⠹⠹⠳⠳⠀⠪⠪⠗

⠀⠀⠸⠜⠸⠝⠏⠀⠀⠀⠻⠹⠫⠹

⠉⠀⠨⠜⠐⠻⠻⠫⠫⠀⠱⠱⠝

⠀⠀⠸⠜⠸⠱⠳⠹⠳⠀⠻⠳⠏

## Finding Out More

We have only scratched the surface, you can find out more about braille music with one of the tutor books. One such is Braille Music for Beginners for the Piano, by Joan Partridge; another is Focus on Braille Music by Lisette Wesseling. The full reference book is the New International Manual of Braille Music (this is not a tutor).

Pieces for piano and flute exams are available in braille from the ABRSM website [www.abrsm.org](http://www.abrsm.org)

The RNIB has a library of braille music for many instruments, [www.rniblibrary.com](http://www.rniblibrary.com)

You can also create your own braille music from Music XML files with programs such as Goodfeel from [www.dancingdots.com](http://www.dancingdots.com), or a web server such as [www.braillemuse.net](http://www.braillemuse.net)

Find out more at [www.rnib.org.uk/braillemusic](http://www.rnib.org.uk/braillemusic)