Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643–1704)

1. He was a **French Baroque composer** who wrote the ***Te Deum* prelude**, whose opening tune is still used as the **Eurovision theme**. It was written around **1692,** and was rediscovered by a French musicologist in 1952. It was adopted as the theme music for the **European Broadcasting Union in 1954**, and has been associated with the Eurovision Song Contest since that began in 1956.
2. He worked for the powerful churches and theatres of Paris, and he wrote music for the playwright Molière. He was composing in the time of Kings and Queens, when fanfares, such as the Prelude to the Te Deum, would have been very common, announcing the arrival of important people or events. A **Te Deum** was a hymn of praise to God, dating back many centuries. It was a very celebratory sound, so the fanfare transfers well for use as a theme for special events.
3. He wrote hundreds of pieces, including operas, sacred choral works and Christmas music.
4. His music was almost forgotten for about 200 years until musicians rediscovered it.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

1. He was born in **Germany** but became famous in **England,** where he lived for almost 50 years. His patron, (his boss, really!), was the Elector of Hanover, who became King George I of Great Britain.
2. His ***Messiah*** has the **"Hallelujah" chorus**, and audiences traditionally stand up when they hear it, and was premiered in **Dublin on 13th April 1742**. The premiere was in aid of Mercer's Hospital Charity. Handel was also closely involved with another charity for orphaned children in London, **The Foundling Hospital**. Founded in 1753, in the reign of King George II, it is a wonderful museum to visit nowadays.
3. He wrote ***Water Music*** for King George I to enjoy on a royal boat trip along the River Thames. He composed ***Zadok the Priest*** for the coronation of King George II in 1727 – it was re-arranged as the anthem for the Champions League in 1992.
4. His ***Music for the Royal Fireworks*** was written to go with a huge fireworks show for King George II.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

1. He was a **child prodigy,** who started composing at age five and toured Europe's royal courts as a child. When he lived in **Vienna**, the sound of Turkish marching bands (Turkish Janissary Bands) was very popular. (These Turkish Janissary Bands are the first recorded military bands.) So, he wrote the famous Rondo a la Turca, around 1783, as part of his Piano Sonata No.11 in A. (The Austrians later went to war against the Turks from 1788 – 1791).
2. He wrote more than **600 works**, including **41 symphonies**, more than **27 piano concertos; 5 violin concertos**; and many operas including ***The Magic Flute;*** chamber music; choral works. One of his most famous pieces is **'Eine Kleine Nachtmusik'**, which translates as 'A Little Night Music', and has a very recognisable opening.
3. He could play the piano, violin and organ brilliantly, as did his sister, who also travelled throughout Europe with him. Their father was a violinist.
4. He died young, at 35, but his music is still loved around the world. His last work was the famous **Requiem.**

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

1. He helped bridge the Classical, (which roughly dates from 1750 – 1820) and Romantic (approx. 1800 -1910) periods, making music more dramatic and personal. He grew up during the era of 'The Age of Enlightenment' and was inspired by ideals of Reason, Brotherhood, and Social Equality.
2. His **Fifth Symphony** begins with one of the most famous four-note openings in music: **"da-da-da-DUM!"** Some say that this refers to 'Fate knocking' on his door. It is a very dramatic opening!
3. His **Ninth Symphony** includes the **"Ode to Joy"** and is now the anthem of the European Union. This was his final symphony, and it premiered in Vienna in 1824. Unusally, it included a choir in the last movement. This chorus was inspired by a poem from 1785 by Friedrick Schiller called *'An die Freude' / 'To Joy'.* The Council of Europe first adopted the music (with lyrics) as an anthem in 1972, then in 1985, the European heads of state and governments approved it as the official EU anthem.

4. He kept composing masterpieces even after he went almost completely deaf.

Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868)

1. Born in Pesaro, Italy, Rossini is a very important composer in the history of opera, who was famous for being able to compose very quickly, and to produce overtures that were like film music 'trailers' for the stories that unfolded when the curtains opened. One of his most famous works is the comic opera ***The Barber of Seville***, which has a famous aria that depicts Figaro, the Barber, dashing here, there and everywhere.
2. His ***William Tell Overture*** ends with a galloping tune that many people know from cartoons and the Lone Ranger. (Did you know that the Lone Ranger started out as a series on radio, in the 1930s, before it moved to television in 1949?) The rest of the overture contains some truly wonderful music.
3. He was only 18 when he wrote his first opera. He produced 39 more, over a twenty year period. He stopped writing operas in his late 30s, and no one knows for certain why he made the decision to stop composing big works. HE spent his later years cooking and eating, and he even has a steak dish named after him (Tournedos Rossini).

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901)

1. Alongside Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Puccini, Giuseppe Verdi is a big name in Italian opera. He wrote some of the world's best-loved operas, including *Aida*, *La Traviata,* and *Rigoletto*. He lived at a time when what we know of as present-day Italy was a land divided into small states, many under Austrian or foreign rule. The campaign for Unification of Italy (the *Risorgimento*, roughly 1815–1871) shaped his career, his public image and his politics. He lived to see a single unified Italian kingdom.
2. Crowds in Italy shouted "Viva VERDI!" as a secret code for the unification movement, because the letters also stood for "Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia", the king of Sardinia-Piedmont who became the unified Italy's first king in 1861. He was tempted

to enter politics himself, and became a senator, but was ultimately disappointed with the persistent poverty in Italy, and the speed of reform by the government.

3. He used some of his earnings to build a rest home for retired musicians in Milan.
4. His "Anvil Chorus" from *Il Trovatore* features the sound of real hammers on anvils, and is well worth a listen!

Bill Whelan (b. 195O–)

1. Born in **Limerick, Bill Whelan** is best known for the music he composed for **Riverdance**, the interval act for the **1994 Eurovision Song Conte**st. It was customary to have an interval act of about 8 – 10 minutes after all the countries' entries had been completed, and before the votes were counted. In 1994, the interval act was the bit hit of the evening.
2. The interval act, **Riverdance**, was later developed into a full stage show, which has gone on to tour the world ever since (with stage design by the Irish artist, **Robert Ballagh**.) One of the directors on the stage show, **Moya Doherty**, was the executive producer of the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest, and had previously worked with dancer, **Michael Flatley**, on the **'Mayo 5000 Festival'** in County Mayo.
3. Riverdance is rooted in a three-part suite of baroque-influenced traditional music called ***Timedance***. The suite was composed, recorded and performed for the interval act of the **Eurovision Song Contest 1981**, by Bill Whelan, Donal Lunny, and other members of **Planxty.**
4. In 1997, **Bill Whelan** received a Best Musical Show Album '**Grammy Award'** for his recording of **'Riverdance'.**