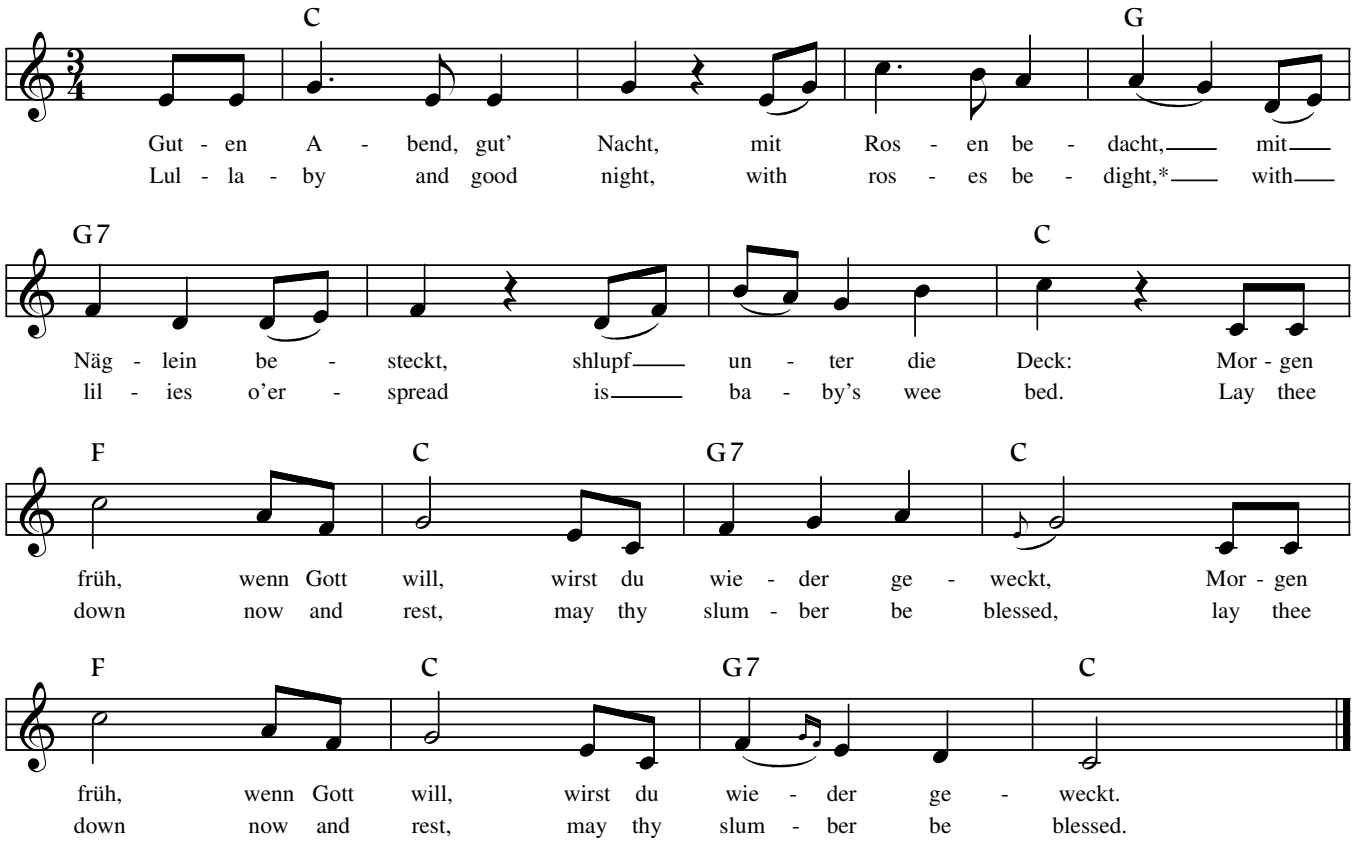
Brahms' Lullaby

"Wiegenlied"

Johannes Brahms, 1833-1897



Arguably the world's most-recognised lullaby, Johannes Brahms originally wrote this piece as part of a collection of five songs for voice and piano (Opus 49) published in 1868. The lullaby (No. 4) was dedicated to Bertha Faber, a friend of Brahms, upon the birth of her second son. It had its first performance in Vienna on December 22nd of 1869, sung by Louise Dustmann and accompanied by Clara Schumann.

The original German lyrics are from Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Alte deutsche Lieder (literally, The Boy's Magic Horn: Old German Songs), a collection of folk poems and songs edited by Ludwig Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, first published in Heidelberg in 1805. (Brentano was later responsible for encouraging Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm to begin their work of systematically collecting folk tales.) A literal translation of the German verse is "Good evening, good night; covered with roses and adorned with cloves, slip under the covers. Tomorrow morning, God willing, you will wake again."

This melody is also used for a well-known Jewish lullaby called "Hamalach Hagoel," using the Hebrew words of Jacob's blessing to his grandchildren, Ephraim and Menashe, as found in Genesis 48:16.

*Bedight (bih-DITE) = from Middle English bedighten, to "deck out" or adorn