The basic unit of the Chinese language is the zi (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each zi has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string zi together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each zi is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest

To pronounce each zi below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about waltzes

律
Putonghua pronunciation: lü4
Cantonese pronunciation: lut6
Meanings: regulate, rule, law, restrain, discipline

律 = 規律 (gui1 lü4 = rule-law) = fixed pattern. 科學定律 (ke1xue2 ding4 lü4 = subject-study-steady-law) = scientific law. 法律 (fa3 lü4 = rule-law) = the law. 律師 (lü4 shi1 = law-master) = lawyer/attorney. 嚴於律己 (yan2 yu1 lü4 ji3 = strict-at-regulating-oneself) describes person who can 自律 (zi4 lü4 = impose self-discipline).


Strauss's 藍色的多瑙河 (lan2 se1 de0 Duo1 Nao3 He2 = blue-color-'s-“Danube”-transliterated-River = The Beautiful Blue Danube) has charming 主旋律 (zhu3 xuan2 lü4 = main-whirl-rule = main motif/melody).

by Diana Yue