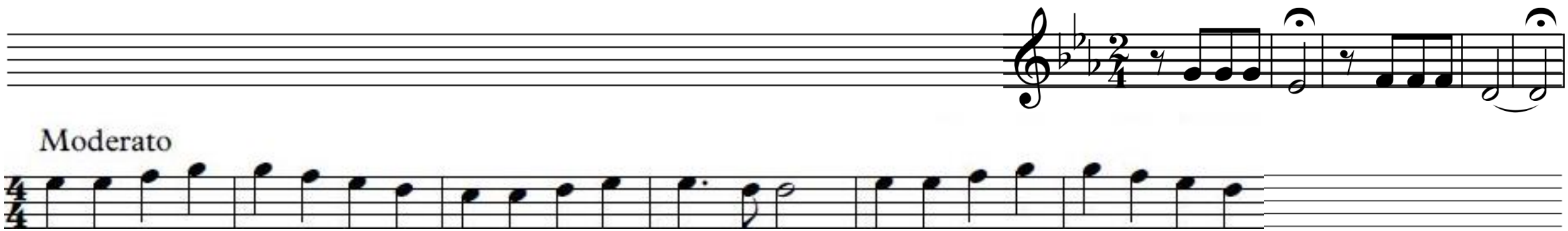
London Philharmonic Orchestra



GCSE BrightSparks Resources

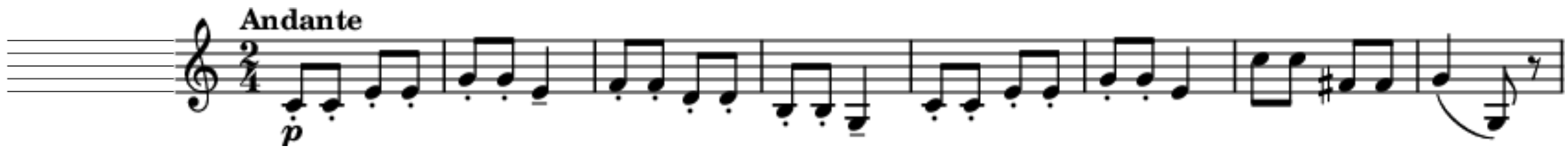
BrightSparks is generously funded by the Rothschild Foundation with additional support from the Candide Trust, Dunard Fund, Rivers Foundation, The R K Charitable Trust, Mr & Mrs Philip Kan, Gill and Julian Simmonds

© Rachel Leach and the London Philharmonic Orchestra 2023

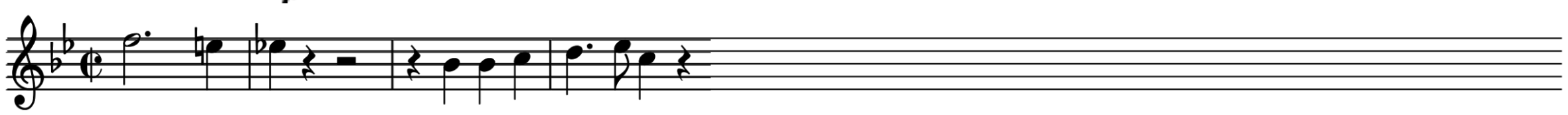


Moderato

A guide to
The Classical Symphony



Andante



Classical period (c.1730–1830)

- Music was shaped into perfect structures, defined by a system of harmonic rules
- Use of balanced, regular phrasing
- Key composers:



Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732–1809)
'The father of the symphony'



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756–1791)



Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

What is a symphony?

- A large piece for orchestra, often in 4 movements (sections). Typically:
  - Movement 1: Fast, in sonata form
  - Movement 2: Slow
  - Movement 3: Dance (often Minuet and trio)
  - Movement 4: Fast

Let’s explore this through Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5…

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Symphony No. 5 (1808)

- Also known as the ‘Fate Symphony’
- One of the best-known compositions in classical music and one of the most frequently performed symphonies
- Described as “one of the most important works of the time”

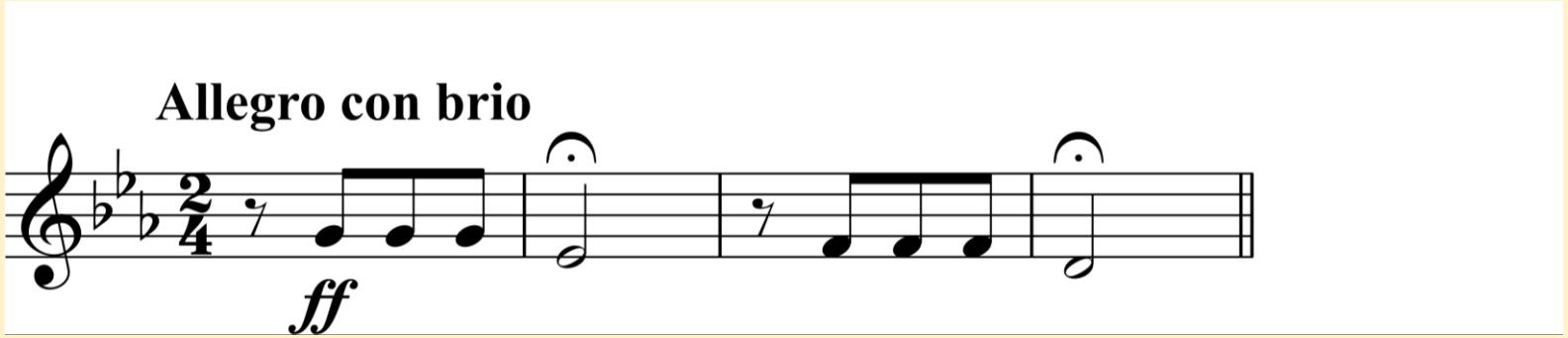


What is a sonata form?

- Sonata form is the structure usually used in the first movement of a Classical symphony
- It has 3 or 4 sections:
  - **Exposition** – featuring 2 'subjects' (musical ideas)
  - **Development** – the musical ideas combine, develop, and the harmony becomes more complex
  - **Recapitulation** – an altered repeat of the Exposition. This section takes us back to the tonic key
  - Often there is also a **Coda** – an ending section firmly establishing the tonic/home key, ending in a big perfect cadence (V-I)

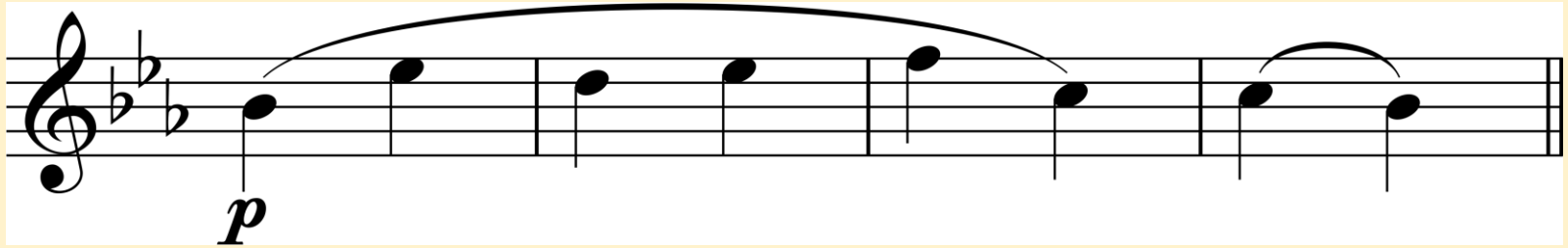
First movement – Sonata form – First Subject

- The first movement of a Classical symphony is usually in Sonata form
- This means it usually features **three** sections and **two** subjects (tunes)
- Beethoven's first subject is huge, daunting, and sounds immediately important
- It is sometimes described as the sound of fate knocking on your door
- It's extremely famous because it is so loud, dramatic and memorable
- This subject recurs throughout the piece (including in the bassline and as an accompaniment)



First movement – Sonata form – Second subject

- In sonata form, the second subject tends to contrast with the first subject
- Beethoven's second subject is a smooth, wandering tune that moves up and down like a snake
- As it is played, you can hear the rhythm of the first subject in the bassline
- The second subject is introduced by the horns playing very loudly (*forte*)



Beethoven Symphony No.5
First movement – Sonata form

- **Exposition** (bars 1–124) – features first and second subjects
- **Development** (bars 125–253) – announced by the horns. The two subjects combine, interact and converse
- **Recapitulation** (bars 254–375) – a return to the Exposition section, but with some differences (including an additional oboe solo)
- **Coda** (bars 370–end) – an elaborate ending that helps to re-establish the key (C minor). Features many perfect cadences at the end (Chord V – I)



Beethoven Symphony No. 5: I. Allegro con brio

Start Slide Show to play video

Second movement

- Second movements are slow
- Beethoven's is marked Andante con moto (walking pace with movement)
- Second movements often features beautiful melody with ornamentation

Ornamentation = trills, grace notes, little 'twiddles' that decorate the melody



Beethoven Symphony No. 5: II. Andante con moto

Third movement

- Third movements are a dance
- Usually a Minuet and Trio – a dance in 3 with a contrasting ‘trio’ section
- Beethoven uses Scherzo and Trio here, which is light-hearted and fun, and also has a contrasting trio section



Beethoven Symphony No. 5: III. Scherzo: Allegro

Fourth movement

- Fouth movements are fast, flashy and fabulous!
- Often in sonata form or rondo form. (Rondo form features a theme that keeps returning, interspersed with ‘episodes’. So the structure is A-B-A-C-A etc.)
- Beethoven’s fourth movement is in sonata form
- Often ends with a large coda and perfect cadences



Beethoven Symphony No. 5: IV. Allegro

Further listening:

- Franz Joseph Haydn – Symphony No. 99 (1793)
- Louise Farrenc – Symphony No. 3 (1847)
- Johannes Brahms – Symphony No. 4 (1885)
- Antonin Dvořák – Symphony No. 9 (‘From The New World’) (1893)
- Gustav Mahler – Symphony No. 2 (‘Resurrection’) (1895)
- William Grant Still – ‘Afro-American’ Symphony No. 1 (1930)
- Florence Price – Symphony No. 1 (1932)
- Dmitri Shostakovich – Symphony No. 5 (1937)

As you listen, see if you can identify the structures, and how the symphony developed from the Classical to the modern period