London Philharmonic Orchestra

GCSE BrightSparks Resources

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Antonio Vivaldi

(1678–1741)

‘Winter’: Movement I
The Four Seasons

(1718-1720)

What is Baroque?

- Baroque is a style of art, architecture, music, dance and literature which was popular in c. 1600 – 1750
- It is characterised by exuberant colours, grandeur and flamboyance, and features lots of intricate ornamentation

An example of Baroque architecture

Some of the most important Baroque composers are…

Antonio Vivaldi
1678 – 1741
Italy

J.S. Bach
1685 – 1750
Germany

George Frideric Handel
1685 – 1759
England

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

- Vivaldi was born in Venice in 1678
- Throughout his career, he pioneered developments in orchestration, violin technique and program music
- He also consolidated the form of the concerto, and helped it gain wider popularity
- He composed many concertos, as well as sacred choral works and operas
- Many of his works were written for the music ensemble at the Ospedale della Pieta, a home for abandoned children
- In 1740 he went to Vienna in the hope of gaining royal support from Emperor Charles VI, but died in poverty less than a year later

Key features of Baroque music:

- Use of continuo
- Baroque instruments, including the harpsichord
- Frequent ornamentation, including trills, appoggiaturas (leaning note), mordents, turns, often improvised by the performer
- Lots of repetition and sequences
- Polyphonic textures are common

Continuo = improvised accompaniment of chords/harmony over bassline, played by **harpsichord**

Antonio Vivaldi

(1678–1741)

‘Winter’: Movement I
The Four Seasons

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The Four Seasons

(1718-1720)

- A group of 4 violin concertos
- Each concerto represents a different season (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter)
- Inspired by the Italian countryside – Vivaldi wrote them when he was working in a chapel in Mantua
- Vivaldi wrote short poems describing the seasons, and then translated those poems into music
- An early example of Program Music (music that tells a story or describes something) – unusual in the Baroque period

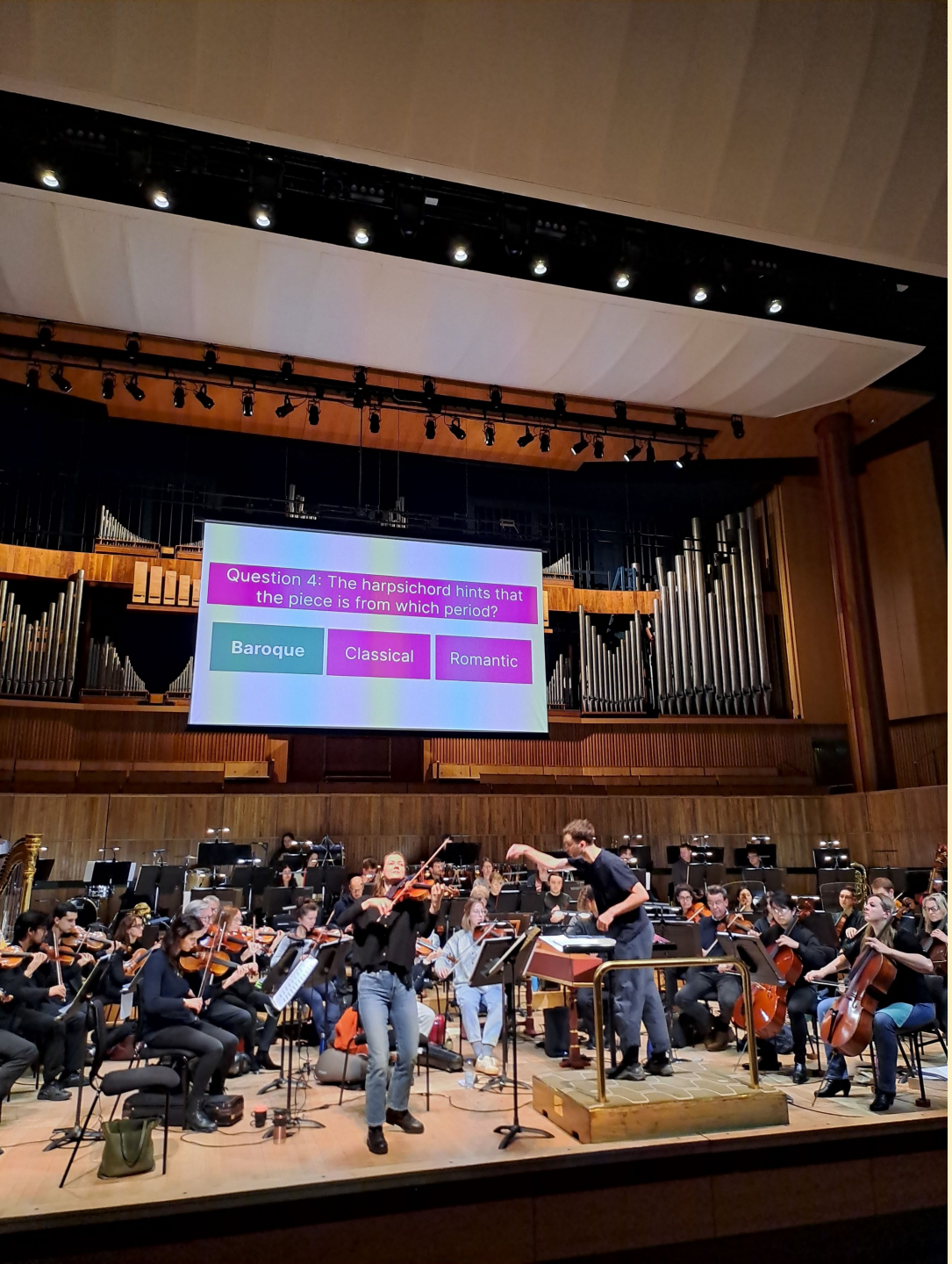
Program Music

- Program music is music that tells a story or describes something non-musical
- It is unusual for program music to take the form of a concerto, as it does in Vivaldi's piece, and it is very unusual in Baroque music
- Other examples of program music:
  - *Symphonie fantastique* by Hector Berlioz
  - *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas
  - *The Planets* by Gustav Holst
  - *Peter and the Wolf* by Sergei Prokofiev

What is a concerto?

- Concerto = a piece for soloist and orchestra
- In the Baroque period (c.1650–1750), there were two main types of concerto:
  - Solo concerto = one soloist and orchestra
  - Concerto grosso = small group of soloists (concertino) and accompanying group (ripieno)

Which type of concerto is Vivaldi's 'Winter'?



Solo concerto

The Four Seasons

(1718-1720)

- Each concerto in ‘The Four Seasons’ has 3 movements
  - Movement 1 – Fast
  - Movement 2 – Slow
  - Movement 3 – Fast
- Each concerto is based on a poem, written by Vivaldi himself

L'inverno (Winter)

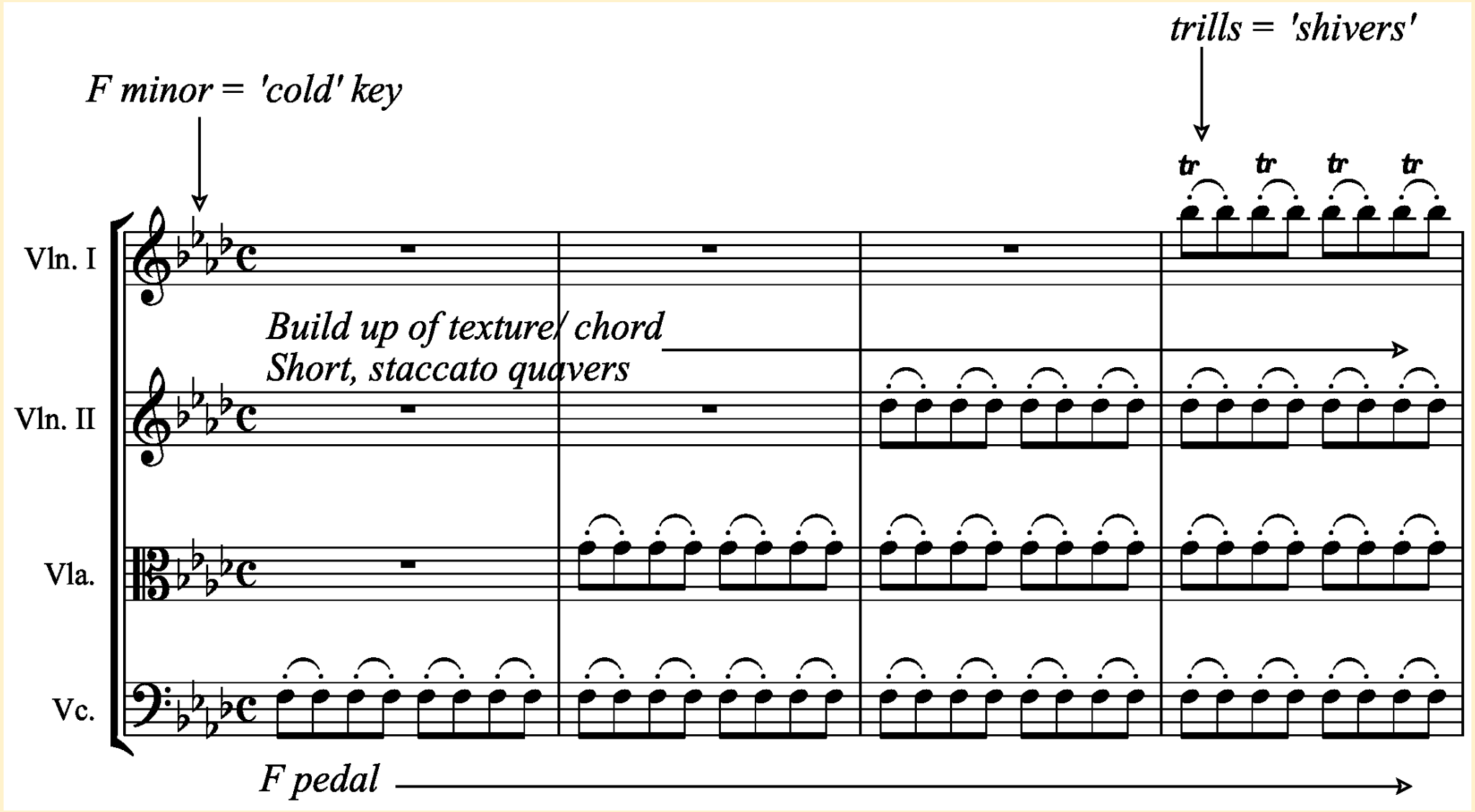
Frozen and trembling in the icy snow,
In the severe blast of the horrible wind,
As we run, we constantly stamp our feet,
And our teeth chatter in the cold.
To spend happy and quiet days near the fire,
While, outside, the rain soaks hundreds.
We walk on the ice with slow steps,
And tread carefully, for fear of falling.
If we go quickly, we slip and fall to the ground.
Again we run on the ice,
Until it cracks and opens.
We hear, from closed doors,
Sirocco, Boreas, and all the winds in battle.
This is winter, but it brings joy.

Aggiacciato tremar tra neri algenti
Al Severo Spirar d'orrido Vento,
Correr battendo i piedi ogni momento;
E pel Soverchio gel batter i denti;
Passar al foco i di quieti e contenti
Mentre la pioggia fuor bagna ben cento
Caminar Sopra 'l giaccio, e a passo lento
Per timor di cader gersene intenti;
Gir forte Sdruzziolar cader a terra
Di nuove ir Sopra 'l giaccio e corer forte
Sin ch'il giaccio si rompe, e si disserra;
Sentir uscir dale ferrate porte
Sirocco Borea, e tutti i Venti in guerra
Quest' é 'l verno, ma tal, che gioja apporte.

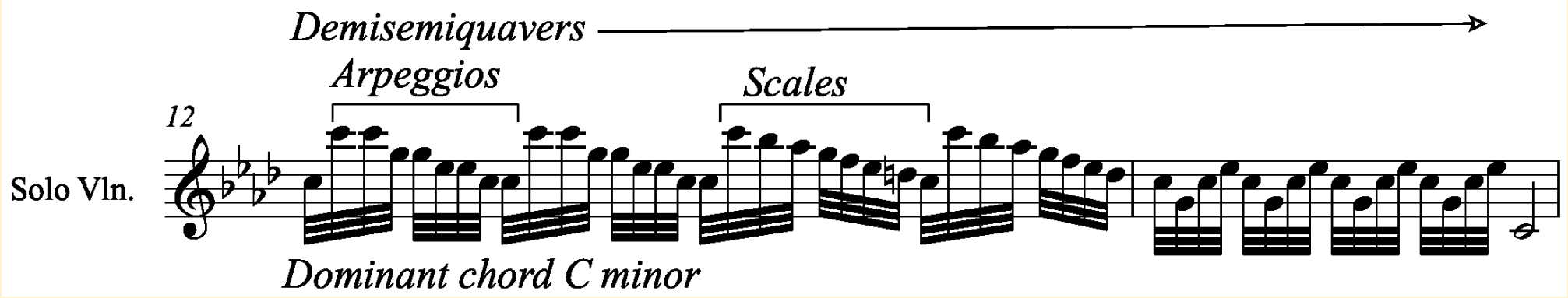
Ritornello

- In most of Vivaldi's concertos, including this one, solo sections alternate with orchestral ones, to show the contrast between the two sounds
- When the orchestra play, it's called the *Ritornello*, which means 'return' i.e. the return to the full sound of the orchestra
- The solo moments in between are called 'episodes'

Bars 1-11: “Frozen and trembling in the icy snow…”



Bars 12-18: “In the severe blast of the horrible wind…”



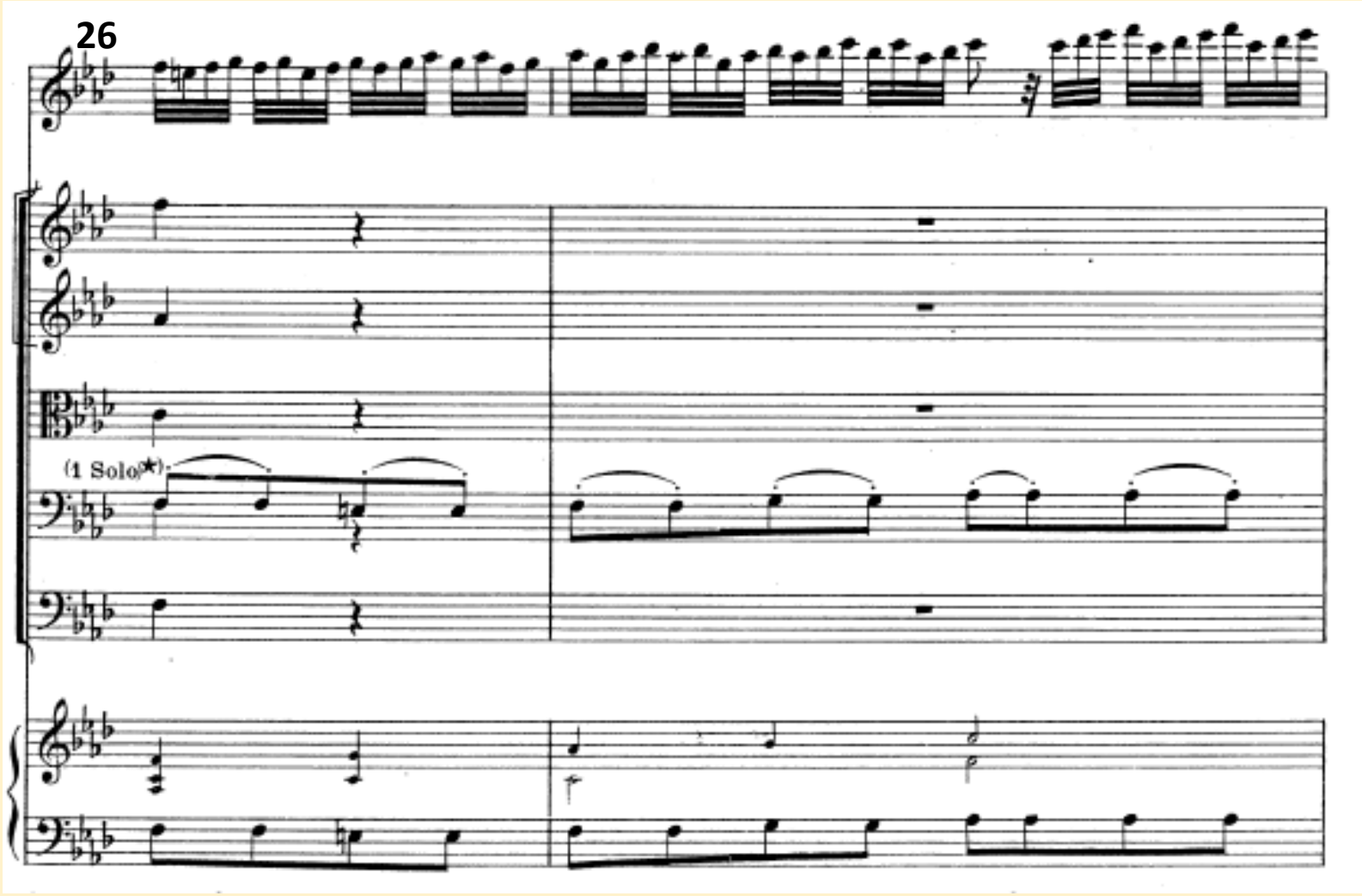
- First entrance of the solo violin, playing demisemiquaver arpeggios and scales
- Each entry is higher than the last, so it is a sequence
- Dominant chord of C minor

Bars 19-25: “As we run, we constantly stamp our feet…”

- Second Ritornello section
- Repeated semiquavers
- F minor
- Moves through cycle of fifths

Bars 26-35:

- Second solo Episode
- Demisemiquaver scales
- Another cycle of keys

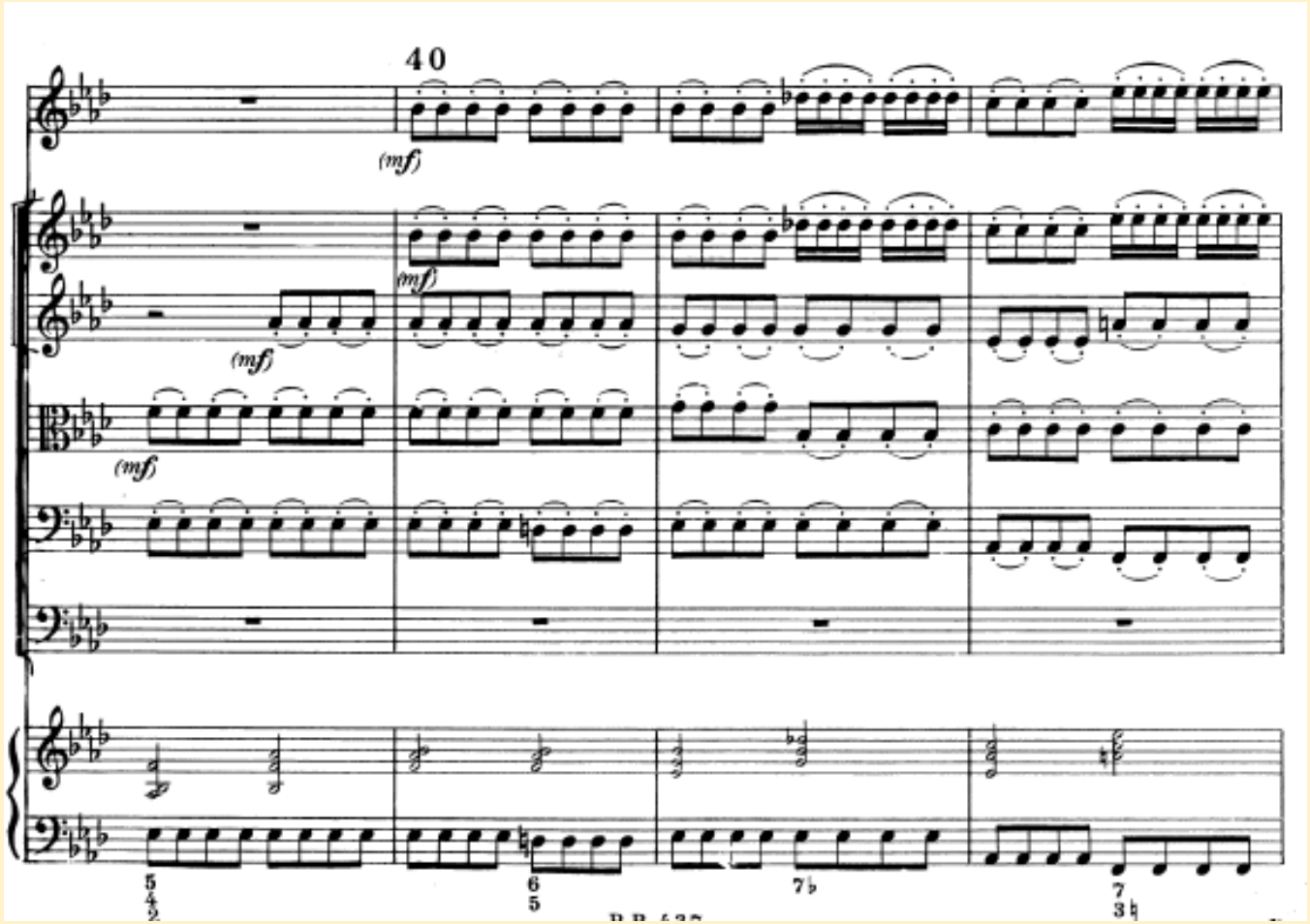


Bars 33-38:

- Rapid alteration between soloist and orchestra leads to…

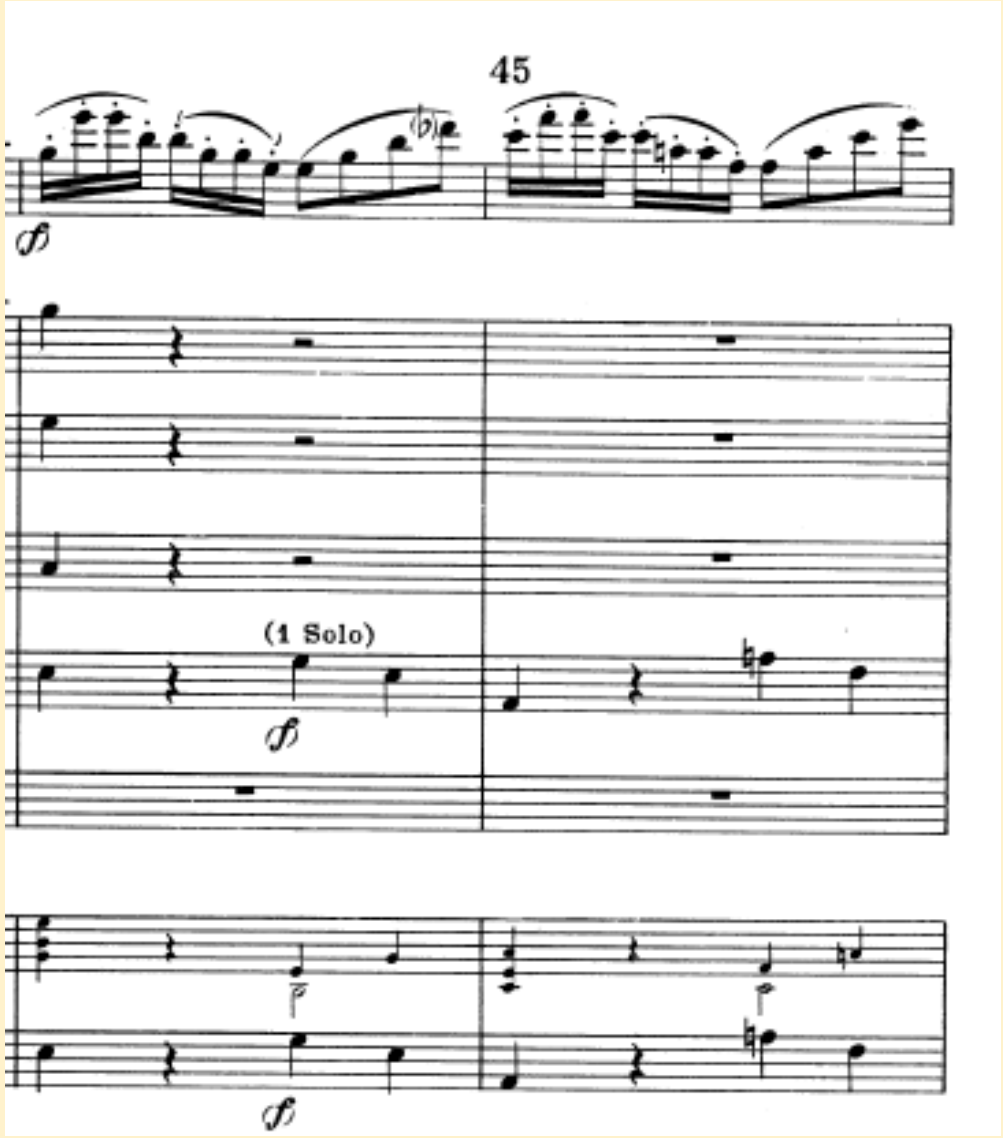
Bars 39-43:

- Third Ritornello section
- Returns to the original ‘stabbing’ chords from the beginning
- Eb major



Bars 44-46:

- Third Episode, beginning with a rising sequence



- Another cycle of keys, moving from Eb major to C minor

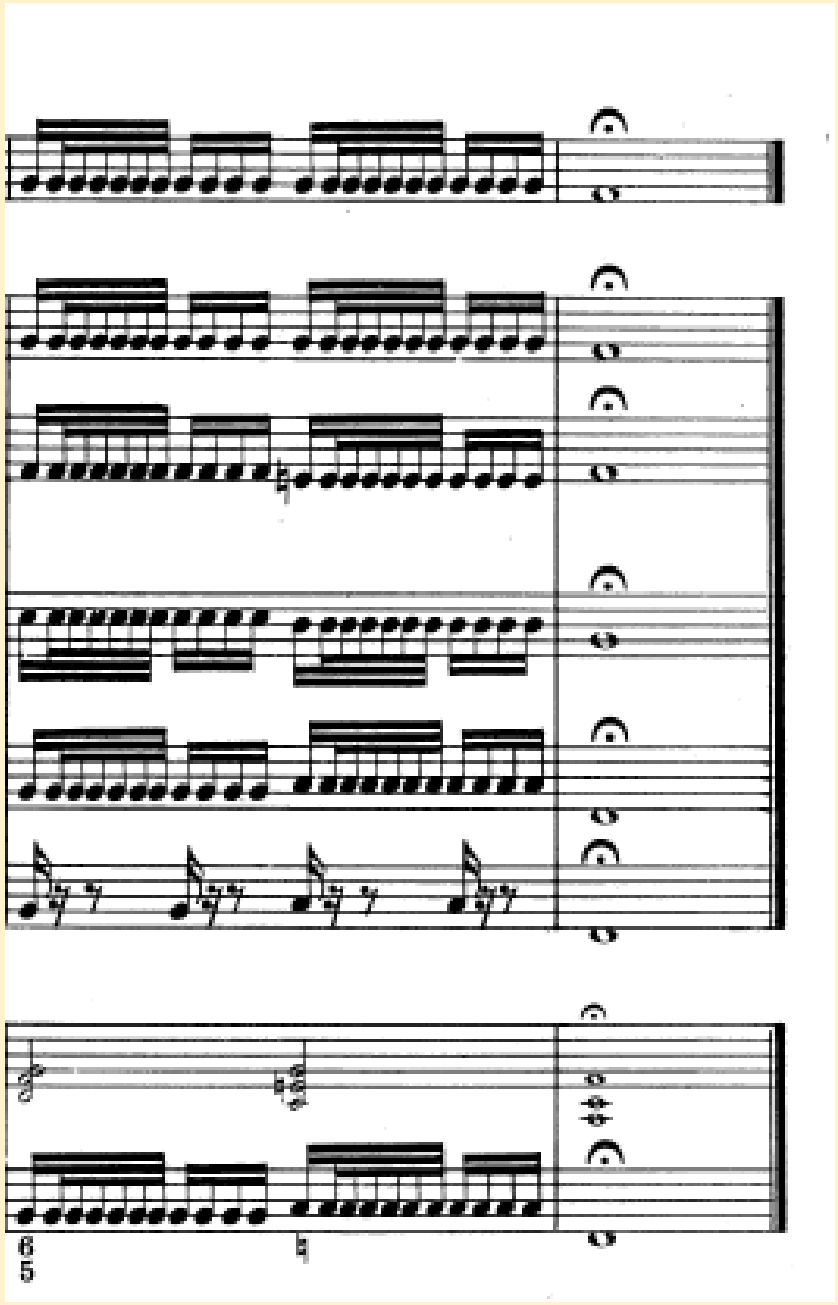
Bars 47-55: “And our teeth chatter in the cold…”

Bars 56-59:

- Repeat of Ritornello 2
- F minor (moves through cycle of fifths)

Bars 60-end: Coda

- **Coda =** ending section
- Perfect cadence: chord IV – V – I (twice) in home key of F minor
- **Cadence =** final two chords of a phrase or section



Further Listening: Baroque

- *The Four Seasons* by Antonio Vivaldi
- ‘Badinerie’ from Suite No. 2 by J.S. Bach
- Songs - Purcell’s ‘Music for a While’ and Handel’s ‘Rejoice Greatly’
- George Frideric Handel’s Concerto Grosso Op. 6 No. 5
- Bach’s ‘Brandenburg’ Concerto No. 5