

Cambridge IGCSE: Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4

KS4

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Introduction

In the IGCSE listening paper, the Western classical set work is found in Section D and is worth 16 marks (out of a total of 70 marks for the whole paper). In 2022, students will have the opportunity to choose between questions on the first and second movements of Haydn's Symphony No. 100 (*Military*) (covered in its own *Music Teacher* resource, February 2022) or all three movements of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4. Questions are usually short and test the students' knowledge of a variety of elements across the works, as well as their contextual understanding and understanding of the score (transposing instruments, etc).

Both set works will also be invaluable as preparation for Sections A and C of the paper: Unprepared Western Repertoire and Skeleton Score respectively. In the latter, students are required to do some simple rhythmic and/or melodic dictation, as well as potentially identifying a likely composer and period of composition. The key features of the respective periods of either work will develop a student's ability to recognise them in unheard extracts.

Approaches in the classroom

Western classical music can be quite daunting for a GCSE student, and opening a score at the age of 14 can be an overwhelming experience to even the most able of musicians at that age. Performing even the smallest excerpt of the set works is therefore vital for internalising the pieces and understanding their features in the most musical way possible.

There are plenty of approaches, depending on your students and the make-up of your classes. The more experienced musicians may be able to play straight from the score or orchestral parts (downloadable from the internet), whereas others might only be able to manage the main themes. It's worth looking for simple arrangements of these works and attempting some kind of class performance. I am quite fond of the combination of glockenspiels/keyboards/electric guitars plus any other orchestral instrument! Playing together will bring the music to life and support the analysis you do from the score as a class.

Returning to performing during analysis is also valuable. For example, when studying the first and second subjects of the first movement, identifying them in the movement and then playing them (especially when they've been developed) will help students internalise the themes and essentially 'make them stick'.

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Johann Sebastian Bach

Background and context: JS Bach (1685-1750)

Before moving to the main employment of his life (at Leipzig's St Thomas Church in 1723), Bach was employed as an organist and Konzertmeister in a number of towns in Germany, including working for Prince Leopold in Cöthen as Kapellmeister. Unlike in Bach's previous jobs, the Prince did not require much sacred music for his chapel, so Bach composed instrumental music for the Prince's orchestra.

In 1719 Bach travelled to Berlin, where he met the Margrave of Brandenburg, Christian Ludwig. Two years later, Bach compiled a collection of six concertos and sent them to the Margrave with a dedication in French. These concertos seem to have been selected from compositions written at Cöthen, and given that the Margrave's orchestra was much smaller than the Prince in Cöthen's, it's unlikely that the concertos were ever performed there. The concertos were eventually published in 1850 in Leipzig and due to the dedication, became known as the Brandenburg Concertos.

The Brandenburg Concertos are all types of concerto grosso, where a group of soloists (the concertino) contrasts with the orchestra (the ripieno). Each concerto has different forces in terms of its soloists, with the dedication stating that the concertos are for several instruments. Brandenburg Concerto No. 4 is written for solo violin, two recorders (described as 'flauti d'echo'), string orchestra and continuo.

Brandenburg Concerto No. 4

This Concerto is a concerto grosso for the following forces:

- ▶ Concertino: solo violin and two 'flauti d'echo' (probably treble recorders, though transverse flutes are often used in their place)
- ▶ Ripieno: first and second violins, violas, cellos, double bass and continuo.

The interaction of the concertino with the ripieno is a key feature of the concerto grosso, and will be explored in detail later in the resource.

The movements follow the typical Italian fast-slow-fast pattern:

- ▶ Allegro
- ▶ Andante
- ▶ Presto

Analysis

Each exam board's approach to the musical elements is different. In the IGCSE, the student should be expected to answer questions that fall under these headings:

- ▶ Structure and terminology
- ▶ Themes and their transformations
- ▶ Key centres and modulations
- ▶ Identification of chords
- ▶ Instruments and texture
- ▶ Alto clef (viola)
- ▶ Score markings, performance directions, instrumental effects
- ▶ Background information about the context and genre of the work

This resource will use some of the headings above while encompassing others within them. Students are expected to know all three movements. Given their length, the main points will be covered in analysis, but it will be up to the teacher to find more examples if they wish.

Movement 1: Allegro

Structure and terminology/Key centres and modulations

This movement is in **ritornello** form, a typical structure of the Baroque period. The ritornello section (literally meaning 'returns') appears in different (usually related) keys throughout the movement, and is usually scored for the full orchestra. In between the ritornello are the **episodes**, in which the soloists explore new ideas or develop existing ones.

Section	Bar number	Key centre (tonality)
Ritornello 1	1-83'	G major
Episode 1	83-136	G major – D major
Ritornello 2	137-156	E minor
Episode 2	157-208	E minor – A minor
Ritornello 3	209-234	C major
Episode 3	235-262	C major – G major – D major
Ritornello 4	263-284	G major
Episode 4	285-322	G major
Ritornello 5	323-344	B minor
Ritornello 6 (identical to Ritornello 1)	345-427	G major

Themes and their transformations

The opening ritornello contains a number of short ideas that appear throughout the rest of the movement, including the episodes.

The opening six bars offer much of this material, establishing a clear tonality from both melodic line and accompanying chords. These are labelled a and b:

The image shows the first six bars of the musical score for the first movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4. The score is for a full orchestra with a solo violin. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The time signature is 3/8. The score includes parts for Violine Solo, Flöte I (Blockflöte I), Flöte II (Blockflöte II), Violine I, Violine II, Viola, Violoncello, Violone, and Continuo. Annotations include 'arpeggiated idea' pointing to the flute parts, 'scalic idea in 3rds' pointing to the violin solo, and 'establishes tonality with tonic and dominant' pointing to the first six bars. Roman numerals I, V, I, I, V, I are written below the first six bars of the continuo part.

At bar 13, the solo violin announces its arrival with a new melodic idea, a scalic rise to some descending 3rds. This is played as a rising sequence in the following bars, which then descends using the second half of this material:

12

c

sequence

2nd half of c as a descending sequence

The final main idea can be found at bar 35, with the flutes playing in 3rds. This idea creates some rhythmic interest with the tie across the barline, and is accompanied by cascades of the second half of motif c:

New conjunct, scalic idea in 3rds

d

sequence on d

Accompanied by the 2nd half of c

Appearances of ideas in the ritornello sections

Due to its length, the ritornello does not necessarily return in its entirety each time and thus the listener relies on hearing at least one of the motifs above to understand the structure. Motif a appears frequently, given its clarity in tonality. This is sometimes followed by motif b, but not every time. Examples include the following:

- ▶ **Ritornello 2 (bars 137-156).** Motifs a and b begin this ritornello in E minor, which is followed by a development of part of motif d, the tied quaver becoming a feature.

E minor: I V I

This is accompanied and then followed by the cascading descending 3rds from motif c:

Variation of d

- ▶ **Ritornello 3 (bars 209-234).** Motifs *a* and *b* appear again here in C major. When repeated, the violin takes on motif *b*, double-stopping in 6ths instead of the two recorders. Motif *c* follows to close this section.
- ▶ **Ritornello 4 (bars 263-284).** Unlike the other ritornello sections, this one does not open with the traditional *a* and *b* motifs, but the previous episode flows seamlessly into the *d* motif idea. One might argue that this is still the end of the episode 3, but the textures and tonality remind us of the ritornello (the solo violin line has stopped and we have moved from C major back to G major).

Ritornello 4

The image shows a musical score for Ritornello 4, starting at bar 258. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a solo violin line and a keyboard accompaniment. A red arrow points to the start of the section at bar 263. Three motifs are highlighted with red boxes: 'C' in the violin line (bars 263-270), 'd' in the keyboard line (bars 263-270), and 'C' in the keyboard line (bars 271-278).

- ▶ **Ritornello 5 (bars 323-344).** This ritornello is similar to ritornello 2, both in its minor tonality (this time B minor) and its use of a developed version of motif *d*.
- ▶ **Ritornello 6 (bars 345-427).** This is identical to the opening ritornello.

Appearances and development in the episodes

While episodic material is often new, it's no surprise that Bach recycles his ritornello themes among his new ideas as well. This unifying approach is typical of his style, and guides the listener through the piece.

► **Episode 1 (bars 83-136).** This solo violin episode is mainly arpeggiated, recalling the opening arpeggiated idea in the second recorder part. The extensive 'moto perpetuo' solo line is punctuated by appearances of motif a, which also establish the tonality at each point too. This happens at the following points:

- Bars 89-91 (G major)
- Bars 104-106 (D major)
- Bars 111-113 (D major)

As a and b seem to signify the start of a section, c and d indicate the closing of one. At bar 125, we hear the two ideas combined to close the episode and take us into ritornello 2.

► **Episode 2 (bars 157-208).** New material between the flutes appears here, though the accompanying quavers in the strings are familiar. At bar 165, the second flute recalls the tied theme of d, with the tie becoming a feature of the following passage from bars 165-185. At bar 185, the music has moved to A minor, and while it might appear appropriate for a ritornello, motifs a and b return to confirm the tonality while the solo violin launches into virtuosic and scalic passages. Motif b becomes a feature of the accompaniment:



► **Episode 4 (bars 285-322).** This opens with the ideas from episode 2, but this time in G major. Once again, the tied theme of motif d is heard in the second recorder part at bar 295 and the tie, again, becomes a feature of bars 295-311. Once again this episode closes with c and d combined from bar 311.

Identification of chords

The tonal functional harmony of the Baroque period dominates throughout. The opening phrase of I-V-I makes clear the tonic and dominant relationship. Chords are usually in root position or first inversion. Cycles of 5ths, suspensions and other devices are used to create tension and release in the harmonies.

Towards the end of the first ritornello we find a number of harmonic devices that create a driving force towards the end of the section:

- ▶ Cycle of 5ths
- ▶ Suspensions
- ▶ Hemiola – often this is seen only as a rhythmic device, but in order for it to be effective, the harmonic speed must also change from a three 'feel' to a two 'feel' in order to give a true change of metre. This occurs at bars 79 and 80 with the chords being naturally felt in twos within the cycle of 5ths.

The combination of these suspensions, hemiola and cycle of 5ths can be found at the end of many

67

Suspensions

.....Circle of 5ths.....

78

hemiola

.....Circle of 5ths.....

of the ritornello sections. Hemiolas are often found near cadences, and all of the devices create some tension and release at the end of an extensive section.

Instruments and texture

The forces of this concerto grosso allow for a great variety in texture in the first movement. Conventionally in a concerto grosso, the ritornello sections would involve the full orchestra (including the soloists), whereas the solo instruments are usually a feature of the episode sections. Unsurprisingly, Bach blurs these lines, and we find the soloists becoming involved in the ritornello sections as well.

Ritornello 1 (bars 1-83)

- ▶ Bars 1-12: the two recorders open as a duet, playing in 3rds and alternating motif *a*. The solo violin joins the rest of the ripieno and provides accompanying chords on the tonic and dominant.
- ▶ Bars 13-22: the solo violin begins this next section with motif *c*. There is doubling of this line in the texture and while the concertino have solo lines, there is an overall tutti feel to this texture.

The two textures above can be found in different variations in the rest of the first ritornello section. Thematically, when *a* and *b* occur, the soloists generally feature more, and on hearing *c* and *d*, the full orchestra becomes involved in more of a tutti-like texture. Exceptions include the 3rds originally in the recorder parts being found in 6ths in the violin parts of the ripieno (bars 31-34).

Episode 1 (bars 83-136)

The solo violin dominates here, with the two recorders and orchestra interjecting with the opening *a* motif. The violinist is mainly accompanied by the cello and continuo, with the expectation that the continuo players realise the bassline with chords. At bar 125, motifs *c* and *d* appear, with the rest of the orchestra gradually returning to the texture, first the recorders in 3rds over a sustained pedal, followed by the violins shortly after.

Ritornello 2 (bars 137-156)

Familiar textures can be found here, with the recorders remaining committed to their 3rds. The overall tutti texture dominates, and this is a short version of the ritornello.

Episode 2 (bars 157-208)

The recorders are the feature of this section, with some canonic moments at the start, while the solo violin joins the ripieno in accompanying quaver chords. This texture is soon reduced to the recorders and continuo alone, with some imitative counterpoint in bars 165 to 184. The continuo part becomes much more active, while the cello plays a simplified version.

At bar 185, motifs *a* and *b* return in A minor, with the familiar texture in the recorders and ripieno. The solo violin begins another virtuosic passage over this, with rising and falling demisemiquaver scales. The chordal accompaniment continues.

Ritornello 3 (bars 209-234)

A familiar ritornello texture at the start, but this time the violin takes on *b* with double stops (bar 217 and beyond) and continues them in among a growing tutti texture from bar 221 to the end of the section at bar 235.

Episode 4 (bars 285-322)

The solo violin continues to dominate with scalic passages, but is joined briefly by the first and second violins from the ripieno, entering imitatively. Bar 241 brings us the opening *a* and *b* motifs, while the solo violin continues the *moto perpetuo* passages. More imitation from the violins occurs (bar 253 onwards). After a brief appearance of the tutti texture playing motifs *c* and *d* (bars 263-284), the recorders take over with the imitative writing that we have heard before, while the solo violin and ripieno provide accompanying chords.

The counterpoint returns at bar 303 with the concertino being accompanied by the cello and continuo. Again, the ripieno makes a gradual return to the texture ready for the next ritornello.

Ritornello 5 (bars 323-344)

The solo violin opens with motif *a*, but we soon return to the familiar 3rds in the recorders. Again, the ripieno becomes gradually more active before the usual end of the section.

Ritornello 6 (bars 345 – end)

The textures are all identical to those of ritornello 1.

Movement 2: Andante

Structure and terminology/Key centres and modulations

The structure (A B C B' C') and slow triple metre of the second movement remind us of Baroque dance forms.

Section	Bar number	Key centre (tonality)
A	1-18	E minor
B	18 ² -28	G major – A minor
C	28 ² -45	Modulates to B minor
B'	45 ² -55	B minor – E minor
C'	55 ² -71	E minor

Themes and their transformations

While the sections may suggest new material as the movement progresses, it's no surprise that Bach reuses his opening material, with the sections being separated more by key. The pairs of quavers in the opening two bars provide the foundation for the rest of the movement. These are often found in 3rds, usually between the two recorders and/or the ripieno violins:

Andante

The image shows the first two bars of the opening material in the Andante movement. The music is in 3/4 time and E minor. It features a repeating pattern of eighth-note pairs in the upper strings, with dynamics marked piano and forte. A red box highlights the first two bars of this pattern.

The first bar of this idea, in particular, is found throughout the movement. In section A, this idea is repeated frequently and varied in terms of how it's distributed in between the concertino and ripieno. There are many 'echo' effects, created by terraced dynamics and using the contrast between the soloists and the rest of the ensemble, both of these key features of the Baroque period and the concerto grosso.

In section B, this material moves from G major to A minor, and we hear similar passages in the bassline as well. The 3rds continue throughout the texture:

Musical score for Section B of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, measures 19-31. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex texture with multiple staves. A pink box highlights a specific passage in the bass line from measure 29 to 31, showing a semiquaver flourish. Dynamics markings include 'piano' and 'forte'.

In section C, a new semiquaver idea in bars 29 and 31 in the first recorder foreshadows the final solo flourish we hear at the end of the movement. The rest of the ensemble punctuates this idea with the lilting pairs of quavers and chordal accompaniment:

Musical score for Section C of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, measures 28-31. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex texture with multiple staves. A pink box highlights a semiquaver flourish in the first recorder part in measures 29 and 31. Dynamics markings include 'piano' and 'forte'.

As Bach continues to explore this theme in section C, pairs of crotchets appear in bars 39-42 in the accompaniment – one could argue they are a slowed-down version of the quavers from the opening bar.

Section B' is a transposed version of section B – a 4th lower. It begins in B minor, but moves quickly to D major and ends in E minor.

Section C' recalls the sustained-note accompaniment from section C, as well as the pair of crotchet accompaniments. The melody is found in the cello, bass and harpsichord in bars 55-58. We hear an extended version of the semiquaver flourish from section C at the end of the movement.

Identification of chords

As with the previous movement, the language is of tonal, functional harmony. Once again, chords are diatonic, with occasional 7ths, and mainly in root or first position. Suspensions and the cycle of 5ths can also be found in this movement:

The image shows a musical score for measures 28-30 of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4. The top staff (treble clef) has three notes circled in orange: a C in measure 28, an F in measure 29, and a B in measure 30. Above these notes are the letters 'P', 'S', and 'R' respectively. An orange arrow points from the C to the F, and another from the F to the B. Below the bottom two staves (bass clef), the chords 'Am' and 'D7' are written in blue. The score includes dynamics: 'piano' in measure 29, 'forte' in measure 30, and 'piano' in measure 31. The number '28' is written at the beginning of the first staff.

At bar 28, the C is prepared on the second beat of the bar, becoming a 7th in bar 29, which then resolves to the B in bar 30.

A cycle of 5ths can be found in bars 40-43.

Most interestingly, the movement ends with a Phrygian cadence (IVb-V in E minor). This type of cadence was used a lot in the Baroque period. It gives the movement the feeling of being unfinished (it is a type of imperfect cadence, after all) and prepares us for a resolution in the final movement.

Instruments and texture

It is the textures and interplay between the concertino and the ripieno that hold most interest in this movement. We're reminded of the smaller-scale concerto grossos by Corelli and even Handel with the concertino repeating and echoing the ideas presented by the full ensemble. Interestingly in this movement, because there is no bass instrument in the concertino section, the bassline is left to the solo violin to provide underneath the two recorders. This adds a contrast in tessitura/register, as well in timbre and dynamics:

The image shows a page of musical notation for the first movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, marked 'Andante'. The score is in 3/4 time and G major. It features a solo violin part and a ripieno ensemble of two recorders and strings. The score is annotated with green boxes and arrows. The boxes highlight specific passages in the solo violin and the ripieno parts. The arrows point from the ripieno parts to the solo violin parts, illustrating the interplay between the two groups. Dynamics markings include 'piano', 'forte', and 'piano'.

Whereas the solo violin was prominent in the opening movement, here it plays mainly with the ripieno in the tutti sections, and plays the bassline in the concertino only sections. The quavers and melodic interest often appear in 3rds, including the bassline at times. The monophonic first recorder lines also highlight the contrast between the concertino and the ripieno.

Movement 3: Presto

This final movement combines fugal form with ritornello form, typical of Bach's style. It's worth students exploring the simpler keyboard fugues in order to familiarise themselves with subjects, answers and countersubjects.

Structure and terminology/Key centres and modulations

The combination of both forms can become somewhat confusing for students, especially when the episodes do not necessarily provide new material, and as in the first movement, the soloists also take a lead role in some of the ritornello sections. This table combines the two forms:

Fugal Section	Bars	Ritornello Section	Bars	Key centre
Exposition	1-41	Ritornello 1	1-41	G major
Fugue 'middle section'	41-189	Episode 1	41-66	G major – D major
		Ritornello 2	67-87	D major – E minor
		Episode 2	87-127	E minor
		Ritornello 3	127-159	E major – D major
		Episode 3	159-175	D major – C major
		Ritornello 4	175-183	C major
		Episode 4	183-189	C major – G major
Fugue 'final section'	189-228	Ritornello 5	189-197	G major
		Episode 5	197-207	G major
		Ritornello 6	207-228	G major
Coda	229-244	Coda	229-244	G major

Themes and their transformations

Given the length of the movement, it's not possible to give every appearance or manipulation of the main themes. A summary is below and at GCSE level, students need to understand and recognise how the theme is transformed when listening to any part of this movement.

Presto

Subject

Answer (tonal)

Countersubject

General counterpoint

10

Subject

Countersubject

Countersubject

Countersubject

Answer

Three different countersubjects (though also quite similar)

Unlike a strict fugue, the countersubjects for the subject and answers are not entirely different in character, and the 'voices' of the fugue do not pass through them in a particular and consistent order. Like the subject and answer, the countersubject is usually a combination of tied minims, followed by quavers and crotchets, in varying orders:

Presto

The melodic shapes of these units vary, but the relationship to the opening subject is clear. The tied note becomes material for future suspensions.

The answer in bar 5 is tonal, as the interval is not the same as in the opening subject (it becomes a 5th, where it was originally a 4th). The move to the dominant for the answer is typical of fugal writing.

In the opening ritornello, the instruments enter with either the subject or the answer, with the last entry being from the recorders in bar 23. The quaver material enters in the violins at bar 25 and, continuing in the recorder parts, brings the section to a close. This material will also be used later as counterpoint:

'Theme spotting' in this movement could take up a whole resource on its own! As a general rule, in the episodes, some new material is presented in the solo instruments, but the subject or answer are never far away. An example is the first episode: new material is presented in the solo violin, with the recorders entering with the subject in imitation. The countermelody in the second recorder in bar 49 reminds us of the motif from bar 27:

41

Subject

Ties from the subject become a feature

47

From the new theme in bar 27?

The new material in each of the episodes is usually assigned to the solo violin, which resumes the virtuosic dominance it had in the first movement. In episode 2 (bar 87), the solo violin continues the ascending and descending quavers, which eventually evolve into semiquavers – again, reminiscent of the first movement. The subject and answer can be heard entering in the ripieno at various points throughout this section. They are also transposed to the appropriate tonality.

In episode 3 (bar 159), the recorders take on the theme from above, playing imitatively, along with the continuo. Before long we hear the entry of the subject in C major in the continuo and bass instruments (bar 167):

159 (U)

The image shows a musical score for episode 3 of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, starting at bar 159. The score is written for six staves: two for recorders (top two staves), two for strings (middle two staves), and two for continuo/bass (bottom two staves). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. Red boxes highlight the entry of the subject in C major in the continuo and bass instruments at bar 167. The subject is a simple, rhythmic melody that is imitated by the other instruments.

The material from here to the end is all recognisable in its numerous orchestrations and combinations. Even the coda (bar 229) uses the second half of the subject in a homophonic texture.

Identification of chords

This is the same as in the first two movements.

Instruments and texture

Given its fugal nature, this movement brings more counterpoint than the first and second movements. Bach also gives the soloists significant involvement in the ritornello sections, though the episodes make a real feature of the instruments from the concertino section. Very much like the 'theme spotting', outlining all the textures could also take up its own resource. Perhaps the most surprising texture is how Bach closes the movement and the whole concerto. At the coda from bar 229, a homophonic texture is used, bringing a final statement of the subject (albeit slightly adapted) before it appears in its original form in imitation from bars 237 to the end.