

OCR AoS1 Beethoven

Piano Concerto No. 4: wider listening

KS5

Hanh Doan

Introduction

The first movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 is the prescribed work in OCR's Area of Study 1 (Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven) for 2024 (and covered in its own *Music Teacher* resource, [November 2022](#)). It's essential that students also familiarise themselves with wider listening from this period. This is so that students are able to put the prescribed work into the context of its place within its genre and the Classical period overall. Studying a wealth of other works from the period will improve aural familiarity, which is essential for Section A, whereas a deeper understanding of similar works will be essential for Section B.

Creating a Classical period timeline, plotting key dates and compositions of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven alongside key events from the period (e.g. periods spent in certain countries or cities) will give students a visual understanding and a place where they can place the works they study.

Context

Alongside this work, studying other piano concertos by Beethoven, as well as some by Haydn and Mozart, will be essential in giving students the best overview of the piano concerto in the Classical period. This prescribed work in particular gives the teacher and student the opportunity to study how Beethoven's writing exploits and expands upon the forms and conventions of the Classical style. Either side of the Fourth Piano Concerto are two contrasting works (the Third and Fifth piano concertos) that could be regarded as charting the composer's emerging style from the tonic-dominant polarity of the Classical style to early Romantic forms and textures. These two works could form the basis for the wider listening, with a focus on their first movements in order to make some general comparisons between movements in sonata form.

Sonata form

The first movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 is in sonata form, though it's not the form recognised in Haydn or Mozart, or even in Beethoven's own early works. By the 'middle period' of his career, Beethoven had expanded sonata form into something with more themes, and therefore more scope for development. The first movement itself is just under 20 minutes long – longer than many of Haydn's and Mozart's complete works.

Introducing students to sonata form should come in two parts. Using Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* will provide a good starting point in terms of outlining the basic structure and tonality of the form. In order to grasp the scale and expansive nature of the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4, however, the double or orchestral exposition will also need to be considered with your students.

The Classical concerto came to begin with this introduction of the main themes by the orchestra before the entrance of the soloist. This orchestral exposition would not, however, modulate, a privilege saved for the soloist. The soloist's exposition would not necessarily be an exact repeat of its introduction and indeed, students will discover a potential reimagining of this in Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, in which the soloist weaves in and out of the main themes, decorating and elaborating them, in anticipation of Beethoven's writing in his final complete piano concerto, which would be completed three years later.

Alongside this work, other concerto movements by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven should also be studied to contextualise it – the notes for the Beethoven Violin Concerto (OCR's prescribed work in 2020) will help for comparison, especially since the works were written at a similar time, but a good range of repertoire will still be required in order to demonstrate a depth of understanding for Section B.

Hanh Doan is a former AST and head of music, and currently works as a freelance music education consultant. She is the author of various books, and writes articles and resources for *Music Teacher* magazine, exam boards and other music education publishers. She is also the OCR A Level Music Expert and currently works in Initial Teacher Education at the University of Hertfordshire.



Beethoven in 1820, in a portrait by Joseph Karl Stieler

Structure and tonality in the Classical period

There is not enough room for a deep analysis of structure and tonal journeys of the chosen works in this resource. However, it's worth bearing in mind the following when listening to any works in the Classical period.

Form

Much of the form used in the Classical period expands on the forms from the Baroque period, particularly binary form. The tonal journey was from the tonic to the dominant, followed by a return to the tonic. Often the tonic was confirmed with a restatement of material that had originally been presented in another key.

Forms found in the Classical period include:

- ▶ First movement form: usually sonata form.
- ▶ Slow movement sonata form (often omitting themes and repeats).
- ▶ Variations form (used in some slow and final movements).
- ▶ Minuet and trio form (often present in quartets and symphonies), later developing into the scherzo and trio under Beethoven.
- ▶ Rondo form: common in final movements.

Although not every movement will fall into these forms, it's worth remembering them as typical of the period since they provide the listener with a good frame of reference.

Wider listening

In order to listen widely, playing some of the pieces is always invaluable. Even a class performance of a slow movement or key themes on glockenspiels will give students a means of remembering music in a style that may not be entirely familiar to many of them. Analysis can take place during performance, with starts and stops to highlight key features and what they sound like. IMSLP (<https://imslp.org/>) provides scores for most works from the Classical period, and simplifications and arrangements can be found in a number of places online.

The pieces selected for some brief analysis and comparison with Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 in this resource are other piano concertos by the composer, written at a similar time. There is no obligation for these to be taught: they are simply suggestions that pull on one specific thread. OCR gives the freedom for teachers and students to search for their own wider listening and make meaningful connections and comparisons, and hopefully this resource may prompt even further listening for all.

The following works will be explored in this resource:

- ▶ Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, first movement
- ▶ Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat, first movement

Comparisons will be made under the headings of OCR's preferred approach to elements. There's a limit to how much detail we can go into in this resource, so teachers and students should be encouraged to explore these comparisons further, as well as consulting the *Music Teacher* resource on the work itself ([November 2022](#)).

Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, first movement

First performed in 1803 and published in 1804, this Concerto was written not long before Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto. The two concertos' styles, however, differ in a number of ways. The C minor Concerto marks the beginning of a departure from the Classical piano concerto to a more expansive form, which the composer developed even further in this Fourth and Fifth piano concertos. Tonic and dominant relationships prevail, with shorter and balanced phrases, more reminiscent of Haydn. Like that of the Fourth Piano Concerto, the first performance of this work took place alongside other works by Beethoven, this time his Second Symphony and his oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. The Third Piano Concerto is dedicated to Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia.

Structure and tonality

The first movement is as impressive in length as that of the Fourth Piano Concerto. Perhaps the most striking difference occurs in the tonal journeys and modulations of the two works. As in the Fourth Concerto, distant keys are explored during the development section, and (in the Fourth Concerto) at the start of the exposition. However, in the Third Concerto, the tonic and dominant remain strong. Other features of the first movement of the Third Piano Concerto include:

- ▶ First subject in the tonic, and second subject in the relative major.
- ▶ Second subject is more 'lyrical', as was typical of the Classical period.
- ▶ Transition passages pass through closely related keys.
- ▶ As in the Fourth Concerto, the development section passes through a number of more distant keys (G minor, F minor, D flat major and eventually C major), though, typically for Beethoven, they are all related to each other. Here we can also spot a tertiary relationship between F minor and D flat major, similar to the relationship we see at the beginning of the Fourth Concerto. Fewer keys are explored this movement compared to the opening movement of the Fourth Concerto.
- ▶ Beethoven leads us to believe that he may resolve the first movement in the tonic major, as he leads us to C major towards the end of the recapitulation. Before the cadenza, however, he returns to C minor and eventually the movement ends in the minor key. As in his Fifth Symphony, he makes the listener wait until the end of work's final movement for a resolution to C major.

Melodic construction, phrasing, and other devices

The main themes of the first movement are compact, typical of Beethoven's earlier Classical style and unlike the more expansive themes of the first movement of his Fourth Concerto.

The first subject declares the tonality of C minor in its opening notes, a C minor triad that rises to the dominant and falls back to the tonic:

Allegro con brio

There is a fierceness to this C minor opening, reminiscent of the composer's famous Fifth Piano Concerto. This opening motif has often been compared to the opening idea of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor. In contrast to this, however, in his Fourth Piano Concerto Beethoven establishes the tonality by quiet G major chords at the opening of the piece.

This theme also finishes definitively on the tonic, whereas Beethoven's first theme in his Fourth Piano Concerto leaves the listener hanging with an imperfect cadence.

Typical of the Classical period and of Beethoven, the phrase lengths of the Third Piano Concerto are balanced: both first and second subjects are four bars long. This is in slight contrast to the Fourth Concerto, where the first subject is an unusual five bars long.

The second subject of the Third Concerto is longer, with an antecedent and consequent phrase, ending on an imperfect cadence. In contrast, the second subject of the Fourth Concerto is four bars long, ending on the first inversion of the dominant, which leads straight into the next phrase, blurring the phrases and allowing for more fluidity of line.

As in the Fourth Concerto, the first and second subject groups of the Third Concerto also contain shorter ideas, which are often used to modulate between the main themes.

Melodic decoration and embellishment

It's how Beethoven manipulates and develops his themes in the Fourth Piano Concerto that demonstrates his move away from a more rigid sonata form, something that we also see in Concerto No. 3. Melodically, Beethoven allows the piano to play with more freedom and virtuosity, often embellishing existing themes or introducing new countermelodies that weave in and out of the orchestra. Examples include:

- ▶ When the solo piano enters, after a flourish of scales and a statement of the first subject, it elaborates and develops the first idea, introducing this first subject in full (bars 120-130).
- ▶ The subsequent passage (bars 131-145) demonstrates the dialogue between the orchestra (which plays the opening phrase in different keys) and the piano, exploring the range of the piano with arpeggios and scalic ideas.
- ▶ The development section in particular allows for more dialogue between the solo piano and the orchestra, as well as virtuosic passages for the piano.

Harmonic language

The harmonic language of the C minor Third Piano Concerto is tonal and functional, typical of the Classical period and of Beethoven's style. His chords are diatonic, including first, second and third inversions. Although the music progresses through a number of keys in the development section, the tonal centre is always confirmed with cadential progressions. This can be heard especially in bars 257-279. Given the triadic and definitive nature of the first subject and the fact that much of the motivic material in the development is based on that first subject, this movement's harmonic gestures feel more Classical, with the root position chords of this subject dominating the movement, in whichever key they appear.

Chromatic chords are used sparingly to colour the harmonies, often at cadential points. This can be heard in the cadence leading up to the development section in which we hear both a diminished 7th chord and Italian 6th decorating what would essentially be two bars of a dominant chord:

Diminished 7th

The image shows a musical score for the C minor Third Piano Concerto, specifically the cadence leading up to the development section. The score is for a full orchestra and piano. The woodwinds (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in B, Bassoon) and strings (Violin, Viola, Cello/Double Bass) are marked 'SOLO'. The piano part is highlighted with a red box and labeled 'Italian 6th'. A blue box highlights a diminished 7th chord in the piano part. The score is numbered 250.

Texture and instrumentation

Beethoven's denser approach to texture and orchestration is evident here, distinguishing him from Haydn and Mozart, but also showing some differences with his Fourth Concerto. As was typical of his style, there is much variety in the melody and accompaniment texture. Highlights include:

- ▶ The opening orchestral unison texture calls the listener to attention, a device that Beethoven used in the opening of his Symphony No. 5, and which Mozart employed at the start of his *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, to name just two examples. Indeed, many of the solo piano interjections are in a unison texture (including its first entry of scales in the movement).
- ▶ While the woodwind begin to explore their independence from the strings, melodic interest for them still occurs when they play as pairs or as a small wind ensemble. It is in the Fourth Concerto that individual instrument sonorities are exploited.
- ▶ The arpeggiated accompaniments (almost Alberti-like) of the second subject are truly Classical in their style, whether in orchestral accompaniment or left hand of the piano accompaniment.

Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat, first movement

Beethoven composed his Fifth Piano Concerto, now known as the ‘Emperor’, in 1809, and dedicated it to his patron, friend, and pupil Archduke Rudolph. It was premiered in 1811 in Leipzig, although without Beethoven as the soloist, because of his declining hearing.

Like the Third Concerto, we will focus on the first movement in order to make meaningful comparisons, though you should encourage your students to listen to the others, particularly the sublime middle movement. The first movement is the longest of all of Beethoven’s piano concerto opening movements, and again expands Classical sonata form, even more here than in his previous two piano concertos. An overview of the distinctive features of this first movement are below, which will hopefully prompt further study from teachers and students.

Structure and tonality

Exposition

As mentioned above, in the first movement of the ‘Emperor’ Concerto, Beethoven expands the sonata form, giving space for more varied piano textures and extensive development of his themes. As in the Fourth Concerto, this first movement features the solo piano before the orchestral exposition begins. This time, however, the soloist’s virtuosic passages are interspersed between loud orchestral chords in the progression I – IV – V7, with the solo piano ending with V7 – Ic – V7 – I, before the orchestra begins the exposition. Although the tonal journey will visit more distant keys, the work will be underpinned by tonal functional harmony, as indicated by this opening gesture.

Within the sonata form, the tonal journey involves move to more distant keys, as summarised below:

Orchestral exposition:

- ▶ First subject: E flat major (tonic).
- ▶ Second subject: E flat minor (tonic minor), moving to E flat major (bar 41).
- ▶ Brief closing passages in E flat major in preparation for...

Second exposition:

- ▶ First subject (piano): E flat major (bar 108).
- ▶ Ideas developed, passing through E flat minor.
- ▶ The march-like second subject is introduced and almost disguised with triplets by the solo piano in B minor. This has been reached by an enharmonic transition from the G flat of E flat minor to the F sharp of B minor (bar 151).
- ▶ Orchestral statement of the second subject (bar 167) in B flat major.
- ▶ Music is developed and passes through a number of keys, including C minor (bar 192), E flat (bar 200), B flat minor and G flat major (bar 203).
- ▶ Tonal instability ensues with development of themes over diminished and chromatic chords.
- ▶ There is a return to E flat major (via B flat) before the we enter the development section.

Development

The development is heralded by a piano chromatic scale and trill, but this time in G major, which is a dominant preparation for C minor (bar 276).

It’s not possible to go through the keys that Beethoven passes through in the development section in detail. They include, however, C flat major and a quick move from B flat major, G major and through to D flat major. As in the Fourth Concerto, enharmonic moves are made to move to less related keys, as heard in the exposition and in the Fourth Concerto.

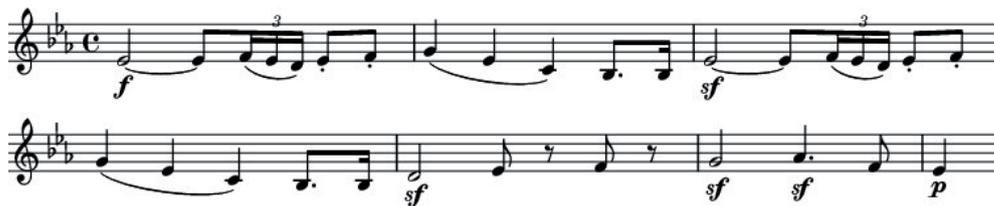
Recapitulation

The tonal journey of the recapitulation takes the listener home to E flat major, but not before passing through more keys, including C sharp minor, F minor and B major. The coda takes us back into E flat major to close the movement.

Beethoven’s use of tertiary relationships (for example E flat major to C flat major) and enharmonic modulations softens the form away from the more direct tonic and dominant relationships of Mozart and Haydn, something that was embraced by composers after him, including Schubert.

Melodic construction, phrasing and other devices

The two main subjects differ greatly from each other in terms of length, character and shape. The first subject is propelled by a repeating semiquaver accompaniment, with rhythmic interest in the triplets, and little rise in melody:



The second subject is march-like in character, lasting eight bars, with mainly stepwise movement.

As with the previous two concertos, other themes are present in transition and closing passages, which are also developed, but it is these two themes that anchor the listener into sonata form.

Many of the melodies (particular the solo piano flourishes) are chromatically decorated, with chromatic appoggiaturas, chromatic scales and melodic passages. The chromatic appoggiaturas are a feature of the Classical period, particularly of Mozart. An example of these can be found in the solo piano at the start of the recapitulation. These are not only a melodic decoration but also a harmonic one, as the chromatic appoggiatura creates a dissonance on the beat.

Harmonic language

Highlights can only be given here, but Beethoven's harmony is still tonal and functional, even if his means of modulation now includes enharmonic relations. As in his Fourth Concerto, many of his chords do not appear in root position, and the music rarely grounds itself in a key. Instead, it passes through keys, often settling on a first or second inversion chord for a few bars, before moving on. In contrast to this, the second subject is firmly based on root position chords. Pedal points also contribute to a less grounded tonality, taking away the opportunity for too many root position chords.

Enharmonic change

In bars 154-155, the music has been in B minor, as confirmed by the perfect cadences in the left hand of the piano. Beethoven takes the F sharp from the dominant key and turns it into a G flat, which in turn becomes the dominant of C flat major:

As well as the above, the use of chromatic chords and scales are frequent in this movement. Again, their appearances unsettle the tonality, particularly in the development section. Despite these moments of uncertainty, the harmony is still overall tonal and functional, but simply with increasing use of chromatic harmonies.

Texture and instrumentation

As with the Third and Fourth concertos, the melody and accompaniment textures here vary greatly throughout the movement and the concerto. Notable moments include (but are not limited to):

- ▶ Dense opening orchestral chords from the full orchestra to announce the solo piano.
- ▶ The piano's monophonic opening flourish, exploiting the upper register of the instrument in particular.
- ▶ The repeated semiquaver accompaniment of the first subject, which propels the movement forward.
- ▶ The contrasting homophonic second subject.
- ▶ Numerous virtuosic textures for the solo piano, including passages where both hands play in broken octaves (especially in semiquavers!), and the closing solo piano chordal arpeggios after the cadenza.
- ▶ There are opportunities for solo moments from woodwind instruments, including French horns and clarinet.