

Teaching guide: Area of study 1

Western classical tradition

1650–1910

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Introduction

These guides have been produced to support you with the planning and delivery of the new study pieces for Areas of study 1–4 (first teaching from September 2024, with the first exam in Summer 2026).

In the guides, we have provided key contextual and background information and highlight how a range of musical elements are employed within the pieces. The content provided in these guides is not exhaustive, and there may be other interpretations or details which are also valid. Please ensure that you are aware of the full requirements for Component 1 as detailed in the current specification. You may wish to share some or all of this guide with your students.

Study piece

The study piece for Area of study 1 is Beethoven, 'Symphony No 1 in C, Op.21, 1st Movement'.

Set recording

'Symphony No 1 in C, Op.21: 1st Movement' performed by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and conducted by Riccardo Chailly – 2011, Decca Music Group Limited.

This recording is available on [You Tube](#), [Amazon](#) and [Spotify](#).

Please be aware that there are several other different recordings of this song. The exam will refer to the set recording indicated above.

Score

Students are not required to study the score of this set work, nor to know bar numbers for the exam. However, bar references are included in this study guide and refer to the **Eulenberg Miniature Score** edition available on [Presto Music](#). A public domain score can also be found on [IMSLP](#).

Background information

This knowledge is not assessed.

- Ludwig van Beethoven was a German composer who lived from 1770–1827. The First Symphony's premiere performance took place on 2 April 1800 in Vienna and was published the following year as Op. 21.
- Beethoven's works span the transition from the Classical Period to the early Romantic era.
- Beethoven's compositions are often divided into three periods: Early, Middle, and Late. The First Symphony was composed during the early period when the young composer was trying to find his place in Viennese musical society.

- *Mature* classical is used to describe music that is typical of Haydn, Mozart and early Beethoven. It is during this period the First Symphony was composed and the **Classical orchestra** was established.
- The **Classical symphony** is a lengthy composition for orchestra. Symphonies composed by Haydn and Mozart settled into a **four-movement form** and their influence is evident in Beethoven's early symphonies.
- Characteristics of each of the four movements include the following:
 1. A fast, lively tempo, often in sonata form and sometimes preceded by a slow introduction.
 2. A contrasting slow movement with lyrical melodic lines and in a different form, such as binary, ternary, variations or rondo.
 3. An upbeat dance in A-B-A form (called ternary) that usually consisted of a minuet and trio in triple metre.
 4. A fast or very fast finale, light in character and in sonata or rondo form.

Further general biographical information on Beethoven is readily available online.

Context

This information is intended to help students consider the wider context in which the first movement of the symphony was composed.

- The First Symphony was composed for what is widely referred to as the **Classical orchestra** which was typical of the period. This was built on the foundations of **baroque** music, but was larger in size.
- During the early period Beethoven was influenced by the music of his predecessors, Haydn and Mozart. The Introduction to the first movement of this symphony has a sense of humour that is reminiscent of the type of humour found in Haydn's music.
- The Classical orchestra was characterised by **strings** with **double woodwind**, **brass** and **percussion** instruments, all of which are used in the first movement:
 - Strings
Violin, Viola, Violoncello (called Cello), and Double Bass
 - Woodwind
Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets in C and 2 Bassoons
 - Brass
Trumpets in C and 2 French Horns in C
 - Percussion
2 Timpani (kettledrums) tuned to C and G (the tonic and dominant)
- The clarinet, trumpet and French horn instruments are all in C, meaning they are **not transposed** - the pitches sound as written in the score.

The following notes contain musical elements and terms that students should know and understand to answer questions on this study piece in Section B of the exam. **Bold type** is used to draw attention to musical terms. Marks will be awarded for knowledge of other terms if relevant to this area of study/study piece.

Structure

- The first movement of the symphony is written in **sonata form**. It should not be confused with compositions called sonatas which are pieces of instrumental music, usually for a solo instrument, or a small group.
- Sonata form is used in the first and sometimes last movements of sonatas, symphonies and other works of the Classical period.
- It is divided into *three* distinct sections called the **exposition**, **development** and **recapitulation**. It was favoured in the Classical Period as it created a balanced structure.
- Sonata form is similar to **ternary form**, where the return of the A section in its **A-B-A¹ form** is slightly altered, and the first movement ends with a **coda** which brings the music to its conclusion.

Section	Bar numbers	Time on recording
Introduction	1–12	0:00
Exposition (played twice) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st Subject Transition (or Bridge) Theme 2nd Subject Codetta 	13–109 13–32 33–52 52–87 88–109	1:06 repeats 2:48 1:26 repeats 3:08 1:47 repeats 3:29 2:25 repeats 4:07
Development	110–177	4:31
Recapitulation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st Subject Transition (or Bridge) Theme 2nd Subject Codetta 	178–258 178–188 189–205 206–240 241–259	5:44 5:56 6:12 6:51
Coda	259–298	7:11

Introduction

- The symphony opens with a short, slow introduction which precedes the exposition. The tempo is very slow helping to create a sense of grandeur or mystery before the exposition begins.

Exposition

- The exposition is the first main section of the movement and is **repeated**. The tempo is quick to provide contrast with the slow introduction.
- The two main themes are presented, called the **1st subject** and **2nd subject**.
- The two subjects are separated by the **transition**, also called the **bridge passage**.
- The exposition concludes with the **codetta** which is a short rounding-off section.

Development

- All the themes from the exposition are **developed**, or transformed, in this section to add variety. Beethoven mainly develops the 1st subject and transition theme.
- The music frequently modulates, or changes key.

Recapitulation

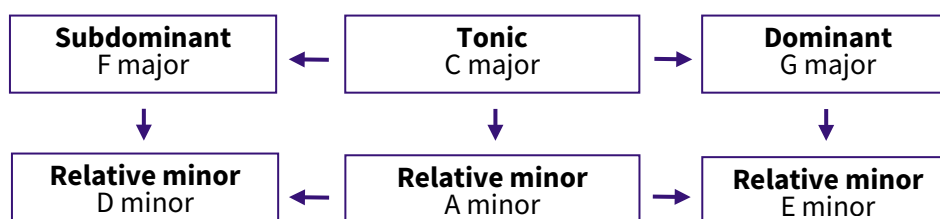
- The recapitulation consists of an **altered repeat** of the exposition. The same themes are heard in this section, although Beethoven makes some significant changes to maintain the listener's interest.

Coda

- The coda is the final passage of music and is based on the 1st subject. It is added to give the movement a clear and memorable finish.

Tonality

- The exposition begins in **C major**, the **tonic** key, as does the theme at the start of the transition.
- The tonality of the Introduction is **ambiguous** because the tonic key is *not* firmly established until the start of the exposition.
- The 1st subject is stated twice at the start of the exposition, first in the key of **C major** (bar 13) and then **modulating** to the key of **D minor** (bar 19).
- The 2nd subject is in the key of **G major**, the **dominant** key.
- In the recapitulation *both* the 1st and 2nd subjects are heard in the **tonic** key, **C major** - the 2nd subject does **not** modulate to the **dominant** as it did in the exposition. This is a typical feature of the Classical period.
- Beethoven frequently uses **modulations** to **closely related keys**. These keys are related **tonally**, meaning that they share many of the same pitches and chords. The following diagram shows which keys are closely related to C major:



- In the development there are examples of modulations to other keys that are closely related to C major. Here are some examples:
 - a) C minor - **tonic minor** (bar 112)
 - b) F minor - **subdominant minor** (bar 126)
 - c) G minor - **dominant minor** (bar 152)
 - d) E major - **dominant** of A minor, the **relative minor** of C major (from bar 158)

Note how Beethoven cleverly modulates to the tonic, sub-dominant and dominant minor keys instead of their major equivalent.

- Beethoven does not confine himself to these keys and is prepared to modulate to **unrelated keys** such as **Bb major** in bar 136 and **Eb major** in bar 144.
- Although the movement is in the key of C major, Beethoven uses some unusual harmonic progressions in the Introduction meaning he does *not* establish the tonic key. It is ambiguous.
- The movement begins with a discord – a dominant seventh – which is the first chord of a perfect cadence into **F major**. This is followed by an interrupted cadence into **A minor** and then by a perfect cadence into **G major**.
- Within the first four bars, the music has moved into the **subdominant**, the **relative minor** and the **dominant** keys of C major, but *not* the tonic key itself. Beethoven is deliberately confusing his listeners as to what the key is!

Harmony

- The harmony is **diatonic**. It is linked to a clear **tonal centre** (ie C major) and employs **cadences** to help establish the keys. This relationship to a key means the movement uses **functional harmony** which is a typical feature of the Classical period.
- Chords are frequently used in **root position**, with some **first** and **second inversions** too.
- There are several examples of **perfect cadences (V-I)** throughout the movement.
- **Perfect cadences** are used to conclude sections, or round off phrases, such as at the end of the codetta in G major (bars 103–106).
- Other cadences Beethoven uses include the **interrupted cadence (V-VI)**, heard at the beginning (bar 2) and the **imperfect cadence** (this cadence ends on the dominant chord - V), heard at the end of the transition (bars 50-51).
- **Cadential 6/4s** (a cadence using the chords **Ic-V7-I**) can be heard at the end of the Introduction (bars 11-13) and the end of the 1st subject (bars 32–33).
- Perfect cadences are strengthened by the use of the **dominant seventh** chord. This is when a seventh is added to the chord, shown by the symbol **V7**.
- The first chord Beethoven uses is a **C7 dominant seventh** chord (this includes the pitches C E G and Bb) which is very usual for the start of a symphony.
- The introduction concludes with a **G7 dominant seventh** chord (using the pitches G-B-D-F) to reinforce the key of C major when it begins at the start of the exposition.
- Beethoven uses some **chromatic** chords to create **dissonance**. During the opening section of the development there are examples of **diminished chords**.

- **Pedal notes** are used to strengthen the keys used in the movement.
- In the first four bars of the 1st subject the double basses and violoncelli play the **tonic pedal note** C to emphasise the key of C major. Similarly, at the start of the first transition, the **tonic pedal note** is used for the same purpose, lasting for eight bars.
- The **dominant pedal note** E (implying a move to the key of A minor) is played by the French horns and trumpets at the end of the development (bars 160–172).
- A chord progression which *descends* by intervals of a perfect fifth is called a **circle of fifths**. This can be heard at the beginning of the development (bars 110–130). Here the **harmonic rhythm** is slow meaning the chords change slowly over several bars.



Note how the each chord descends a fifth interval to create a **circle of fifths**.

- An example of a **harmonic sequence** is heard in the transition of the recapitulation (bars 189–198). Beethoven uses one chord per bar:

C7 to F - D7 to G - E7 to Am - F7 to Bb - G7 to C - A7 to Dm

Each two-chord pattern *ascends* one step to form the sequence and Beethoven cleverly modulates several times by using a succession of **V7-I** chords.

- Beethoven harmonises parts in **thirds** to enrich the sound. This is evident in the woodwind instruments when the 2nd subject is first heard (bars 57–59 and 65–68).
- The timpani are tuned to the pitches C and G to reinforce the **tonic** and **dominant** chords, such as at the end of the exposition.
- The French horns in C use a small range of pitches which either play **pedal** notes (as at the start of the development), the **root** of a chord (in the bars leading into the 2nd Subject), or to fill in as **harmony notes** - pitches used in the chord. Many examples are evident in the development.

Melody

- Beethoven's melodies are **diatonic** with some **chromaticism**.
- The **1st subject**, played by the 1st violins from bar 13, is based around the notes of the **tonic triad** (C – E – G) and an **ascending semitone** (B to C).
- The 1st subject consists of two **six-bar phrases** which are of an **irregular** length. In the Classical period phrases were usually even, being either four or eight bars long.
- The first six-bar phrase uses only **four pitches** taken from the key of C major (C – E – G – B).
- The second phrase introduces **C#**, a **chromatic** pitch, because it is based on the key of D minor.
- The 1st subject melody concludes in the fifth bar, not the sixth, as two bars of woodwind chords lead us into the following phrase.
- The 1st subject returns in the first part of the codetta in bars 88–100.
- The opening of the development treats the 1st subject quavers in **sequence** (compare the 1st violin melody of bars 110–112 with bars 114–116 and 118–120)

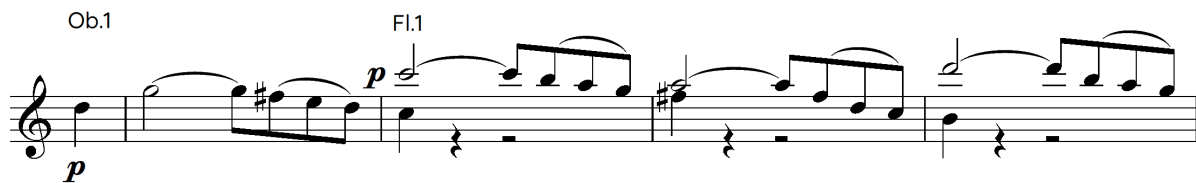
- At the start of the recapitulation, the 1st subject is repeated but with different instrumentation.

1st Subject



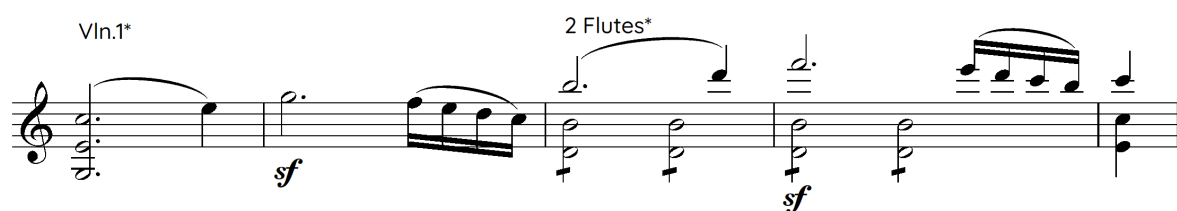
- The **2nd subject** is played by the woodwind. The strings provide the accompaniment.
- This subject consists of two eight-bar phrases (bars 53–68) composed in the style of a question and answer response, or **antecedent** and **consequent**. This is an example of **balanced phrasing**.
- The first half of the 2nd subject consists of a **dialogue** between the flute and oboe. It is played as a **sequence** with the flute *echoing* the oboe a **perfect fourth** higher on both occasions.
- Beethoven incorporates **passing notes** in each **falling quaver motif**.

2nd Subject



- The transition theme is a **four-bar phrase** divided between the 1st and 2nd violins for two bars and flutes and clarinets for two bars.
- The theme consists of **ascending thirds** which form a **triad**. The first triad uses the notes from a chord of C major.
- Each triad is followed by a short, **descending scalar motif**.
- Just as heard in the 2nd subject, Beethoven incorporates **passing notes** but this time in each falling semiquaver motif.

Transition theme



* Violin 2 doubles violin 1 an octave lower and the oboes double the flutes an octave lower.

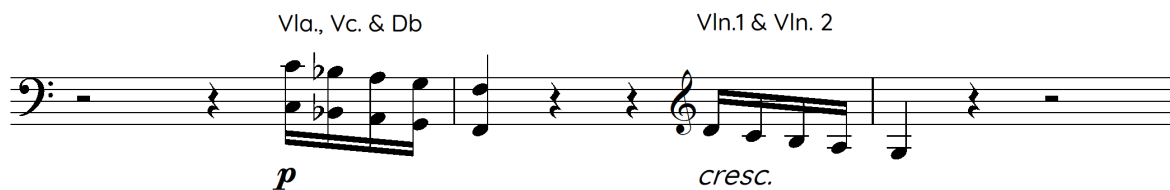
- A **countermelody** is introduced at the end of the exposition (bar 79) and is played by the oboes before being joined by the bassoons. This melody plays alongside the 2nd subject in the lower strings.
- A **cadential phrase** concludes the exposition. It consists of a **repetitive motif** played by the 1st violins and flutes. It provides a convincing conclusion to the exposition.

Cadential phrase



- In the recapitulation, a five-note **descending semiquaver motif** is used (it is taken from the 1st subject and transition theme).
- The motif is treated as a **sequence** over several bars.
- It is also played as a **dialogue** between the upper and lower strings.

Five-note descending motif



- Throughout the movement there are a number of other melodic features including:
 - a) **chromaticism** (G# and C# in bars 4 and 6)
 - b) **passing notes** (C in bars 4 and 5)
 - c) **appoggiatura** (D falling to C in bar 6)
 - d) **ornamentation** - a **trill** in the strings (bar 24) and **acciaccaturas** in the oboe's countermelody (bars 81 and 84)
 - e) **arpeggios** and **broken chords** at the end of the 1st subject (bars 29–30)
 - f) **scalic passages** – such as the G major scale played by the strings before the exposition begins (bar 12).

Texture

Beethoven exploits many different types of texture to create contrast within the movement.

- **Homophonic** textures occurs in many places.
- The slow introduction begins with eight **homophonic** chords. Other examples may be heard in the bars leading into the transition (bars 31–32) and at the end, which is also played **tutti** (meaning all instruments play).
- **Tutti** is used for dramatic purposes. Examples of this texture are heard at key moments, such as at the end of the 1st subject (bars 29–33), the beginning of the recapitulation, (bars 178–181), and the final bars of the coda.
- **Melody with accompaniment** is used in the 1st and 2nd subjects and transition theme.
- The 1st subject melody is accompanied by **homophonic** chords which are played in the lower string parts (bars 18–21 and 21–24).
- The beginning of the 2nd subject (bars 53–56) consists of a **layered** texture. The first layer is the woodwind melody and the second, the string accompaniment moving in crotchets underneath it.
- At the end of the first transition (bars 45–49) a *dialogue* is heard between the woodwind and strings creating an **antiphonal** texture.
- The 1st violin plays the melody as a **monophonic** texture on a few occasions (bars 110–111, 114–115, 118–119 and 142–143).
- Beethoven frequently writes melodies which play in **octaves**. One octave is the distance between two pitches of the same letter name, but eight steps apart. On other occasions he writes melodies that cover a wide range of **two, three, four** or even **five octaves**.

Examples include:

1. The transition theme is played in **octaves** by the 1st and 2nd violins. Octaves are heard as early as bar 4, but only briefly, again played by the 1st and 2nd violins.
 2. The linking woodwind phrases played at the end of the exposition cover a **three octave** range (bars 106–109).
 3. In the first codetta the whole orchestra plays over a **four octave range** (bars 97–99). Remember the double basses sound an **octave** lower than written!
 4. At the start of the recapitulation all the string and woodwind instruments play the 1st subject over a **five octave range** (bars 178–181 and 184–187).
- Beethoven exploits **imitation** with the use of a three-note motif in the middle of the development (bars 144–158). The motif, taken from the 1st subject, is **imitated** by the 1st bassoon, 1st oboe and 1st flute and lower string parts.
 - When the codetta begins (bars 88–89), the motif in the lower strings is **imitated** by the upper strings and woodwind parts.
 - Beethoven uses a short **canon** which lasts for four bars between the 1st and 2nd violins in the development (bars 136–139).
 - As the two violin parts the canon, the melodies move in **contrary motion** (opposite directions).

- **Contrary motion** can also be found in the development between the flute and 1st violins (bars 131 and 133).

Tempo and metre

- The Introduction is marked a solemn ***Adagio molto*** tempo meaning 'very slow'.
- The remaining part of the movement is marked ***Allegro con brio*** meaning 'fast and with spirit'.
- The **time signature** is **4/4 - common time** at the beginning of the movement but changes to **2/2 – alla breve** (also known as *cut time*) at the beginning of the exposition.

Rhythm

- **Dotted rhythms** are used throughout the movement.
- The rhythm of the 1st subject is characterised by a **dotted minim** followed by a **dotted quaver** and **semiquaver** played twice. It is followed by a series of repeated **quavers** and **crotchets**, each lasting a bar in length.

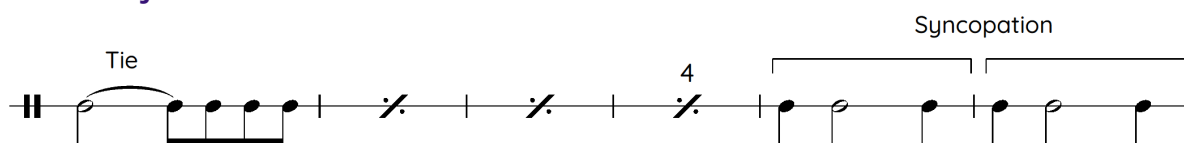
1st Subject



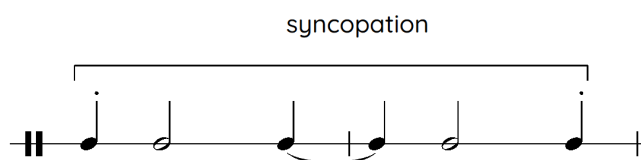
The combined dotted quaver and semiquaver rhythm (ie beat 4) is separated and treated independently in the development.

- The rhythm of the 2nd subject is **repetitive**. The first bar is repeated four times and includes a **tie** from the third to fourth beats. It is followed by two bars of **syncopation** played by the woodwind.

2nd Subject

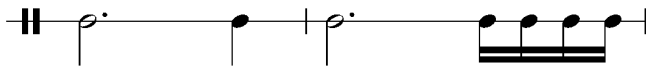


- Notice how Beethoven develops the same rhythm in the development by adding a **tie** over the bar line to extend the syncopation over two bars.



- The transition theme begins with a **dotted minim**, the same duration used at the start of the 1st subject, but this time Beethoven adds a **crotchet** and four **semiquavers** to create a two-bar rhythm which is repeated twice.

Transition theme



- Many of the scalar passages and motifs consist of groups of quavers or semiquavers. However, just before the exposition begins four **demisemiquavers** provide an exciting lead into the 1st subject.

To contrast with the short rhythmic values, there are other moments where longer values are used. At the end of the exposition the woodwind plays groups of **minims**, whilst at the end of the development they play **semibreves**.

Articulation

- There is frequent use of **legato** (smooth playing) and **staccato** (detached playing) articulation in the string and woodwind instruments.
- In the 1st subject there are examples of two pairs of **slurs** and two bars of **staccato** markings. This provides a balance of articulation.
- The opening of the 2nd subject has a staccato accompaniment played by the 1st and 2nd violins.
- The transition theme is played **legato** and includes many slurred notes.
- The end of both the exposition and development is played **legato** by the woodwind.
- There are many examples of **staccato** playing in the string and woodwind parts in the development.
- In the Introduction, the term **tenuto** (abbreviated as *ten*) is used on four occasions in all instruments except the timpani. This means slightly 'held' or 'sustained' and indicates that the notes should receive some degree of emphasis.
- The coda consists of a combination of **staccato** rhythms played alongside held, sustained pitches.

Dynamics

- Beethoven uses a full range of dynamics from **pianissimo** (**pp** - very quiet) to **fortissimo** (**ff** - very loud).
- There constant use of dynamic *contrast* to create dramatic effect. Some notable examples include:
 - fortepiano** / **fp** - loud then immediately quiet) heard in the opening two bars of the introduction
 - sforzando** / **sf** - a sudden loud accent on an individual note or chord) heard midway through the 1st subject, changing from **p** to **sf** (bars 25–29)
 - The codetta also includes four **sf** chords played one after the other (bars 241–244)

4. **diminuendos** / **dim** - getting quieter) heard in the woodwind during the final bars of the exposition
5. **crescendos** / **cresc** - getting louder) often occur at key moments, such as when leading into the codetta (bars 85–87) and the coda (bars 269–270)
6. A long, drawn-out five-bar **crescendo** is heard in the recapitulation (bars 191–196), starting **p** and building up to **ff**
7. The last 21 bars are entirely an **ff** tonic chord over which the 1st subject makes its final appearance
8. **Forte** chords (played as single chords) are followed by contrasting **piano** passages at the beginning of the development (bars 110–121)
9. **Fortissimo** chords are followed by contrasting **pianissimo** passages towards the end of the development (bars 229–230).

Other dynamic markings to take note of are evident in the following places:

- The first two phrases of the 1st subject and the opening of the 2nd subject are played **p**
- The transition theme in the exposition begins **ff** with some **sf** interjections
- The end of the development uses dramatic dynamic changes, including **ff**, **sf**, **diminuendo**, **p** and **crescendo** (bars 171–177)
- The coda concludes the movement emphatically by playing **ff** with some **crescendos** and **sf** chords.

Sonority (Timbre)

- Strings play **double** or **triple stopping** and, on one occasion, **quadruple stopping!** The 1st and 2nd violins play each of these in the opening four bars. Beethoven uses this technique to create a dramatic start.
- Strings also play **arco** (bowed) and **pizzicato** (plucked). The movement begins with strings playing the chords **pizzicato**.
- A trill (written as **tr**) in the **timpani** part always means a **roll** and an example is heard in the coda (bars 269–270).
- The most common way of writing a timpani roll is by adding **tremolo** lines. Beethoven also uses this at the end of the coda (bars 288–291) to add a sense of drama and atmosphere to the music.
- In addition to the timpani, all string instruments play tremolos near the end of the coda.
- Tutti passages help to create a full and rich sonority.