

## Harmony/tonality

Classical era expositions state their key centres strongly so the listener can clearly 'hang their ear' on this key for the rest of the piece. In Beethoven's 3<sup>rd</sup> Piano Concerto, the first three notes of the piece are the C minor triad. A lot of Beethoven's pieces give off a dark vibe, possibly reflecting his harsh upbringing and moody temperament and C minor is definitely a dark key.

4



The tonic key is very important in Classical music because it gives the piece structure and stability. In the first 2 bars (above), the triadic motif A is played by the strings. These first 2 bars are played softly (*p*) and are followed by the *urmotif* in bars 3 and 4 (tonic/dominant). This gives a short but strong and memorable beginning that returns many times in the movement.

1

While the exposition (beginning of the piece) starts strongly in the tonic key of C minor, it soon modulates at bar 24, into Eb major, the relative major, to announce the second, contrasting theme. When the piece reaches bar 50, the key of Eb major continues into the second subject.

2

Throughout the development Beethoven modulates through several keys, all related somehow to the original tonal centre of C minor, for example bar 269 the development begins in F minor, which is the subdominant of the tonic. At bar 340 the second theme is in C major, the tonic major.

3

These changes and modulations create a level of dramatisation and tension, but we always know that the music will end up back in the tonic key of C minor eventually. And although there is a level of dramatic effect, the sonata-form structure of the concerto still remains. This lets Beethoven keep the attention of the listener, while also keeping them on the edge of their seat.

5