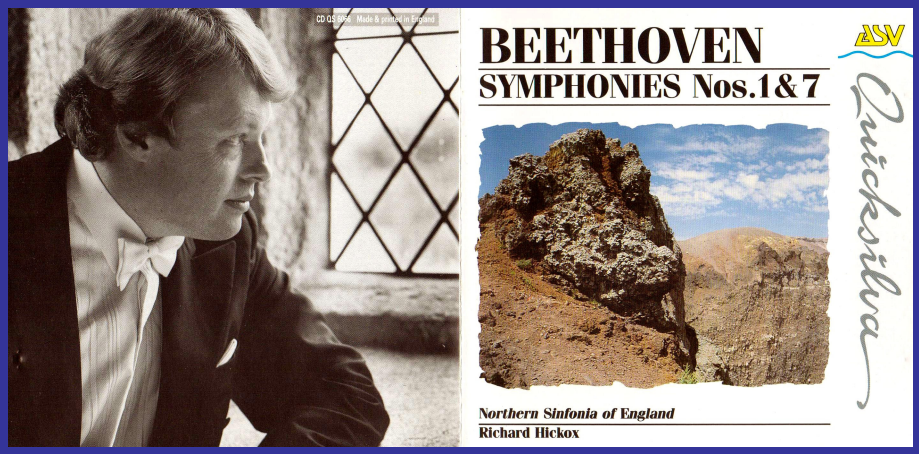
Beethoven: *Symphony 7 in A*



Beethoven: *Symphony 7 in A*

1. *Poco sostenuto – Vivace* (14')
2. *Allegretto* (10')
3. *Presto* (10')
4. *Allegro con brio* (8½')

Beethoven: *Symphony 7 in A*

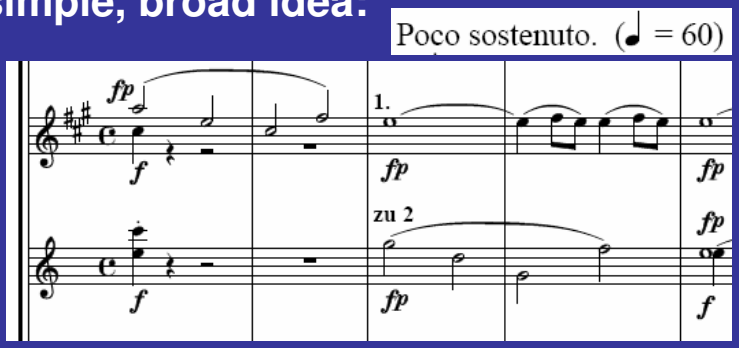
- First performed in 1813
- According to UK performance and CD sales data, this is the 4th most popular Beethoven symphony (after 6, 9 and 5)

Beethoven: *Symphony 7 in A*

- Wagner called this Symphony "The Apotheosis of the Dance" because of the pulsing rhythms that permeate almost the entire work
- Other commentators have noted that Beethoven was making some arrangements of Irish folk songs at about this time, and claim to have traced certain parallels with some of these tunes in the 7th Symphony
- Berlioz described the first movement as a "country dance"

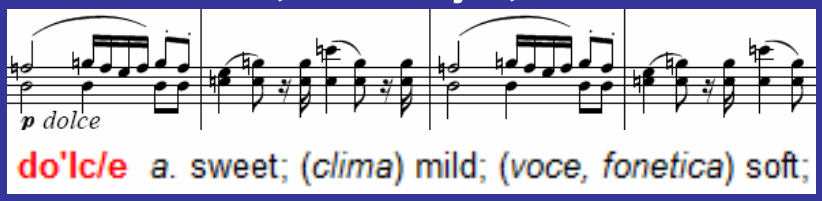
First movement: *Poco sostenuto - Vivace*

- Opens in A major – the home key
- The movement begins slowly with this simple, broad idea:



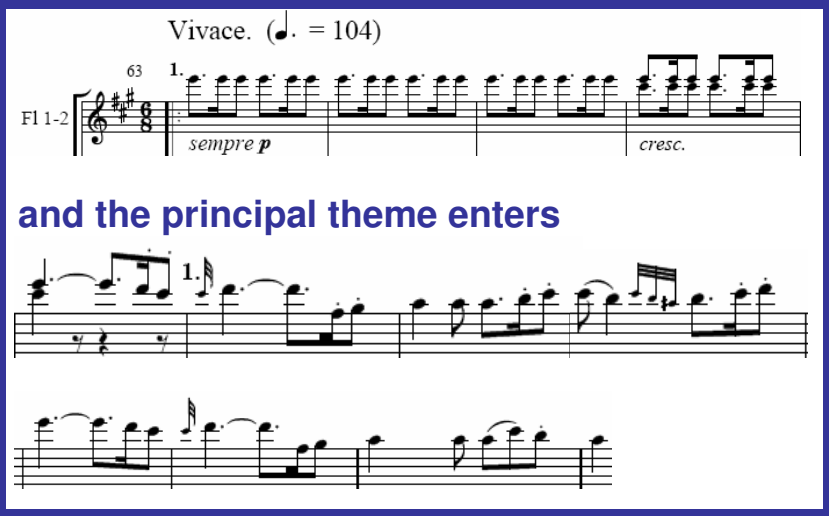
which is then developed with rising semi-quaver scales

- …..after which we arrive at the first march theme, in C major, marked *dolce*

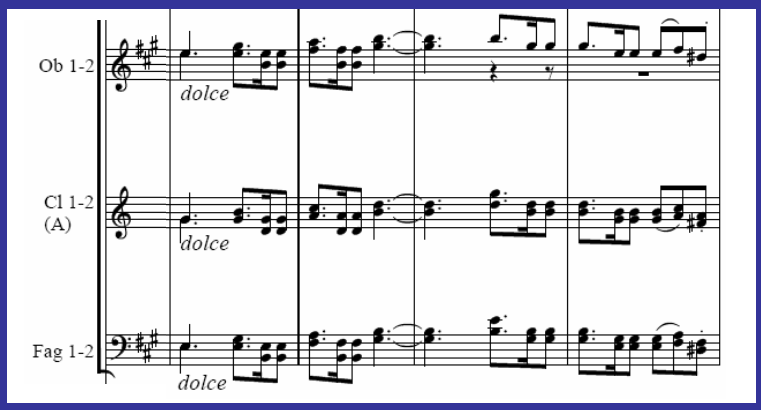


- The slow introduction then recaps on the simple theme, semi-quaver scales and *dolce* march theme, in total lasting about 4 minutes

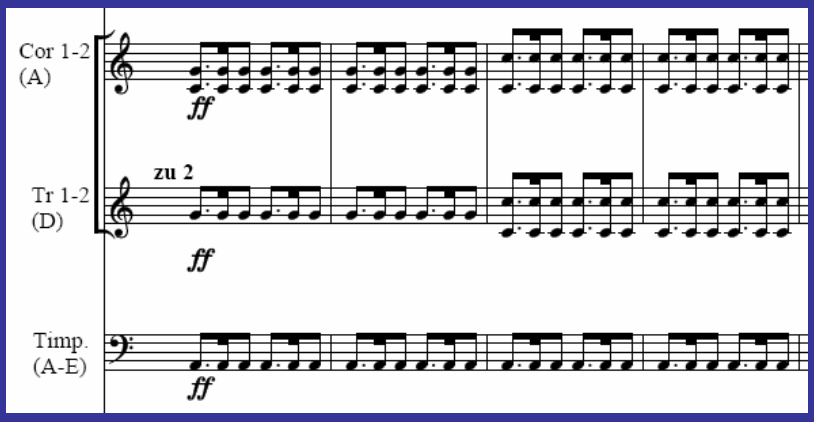
- The transition to the rhythm of the *Vivace* (long-short-short-long) gradually gather momentum on a single note (E),



- Usually the second subject is a complete contrast to the first, but here the two themes have similar rhythms



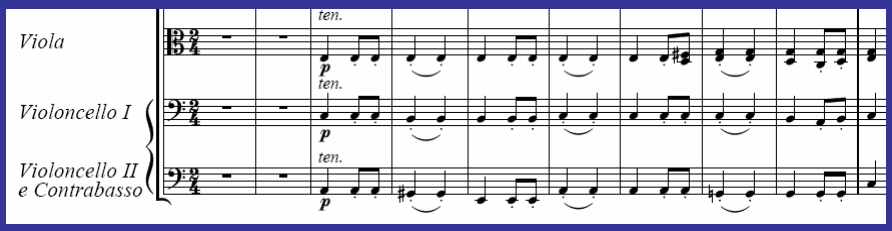
- This rhythm persists throughout the remainder of the movement



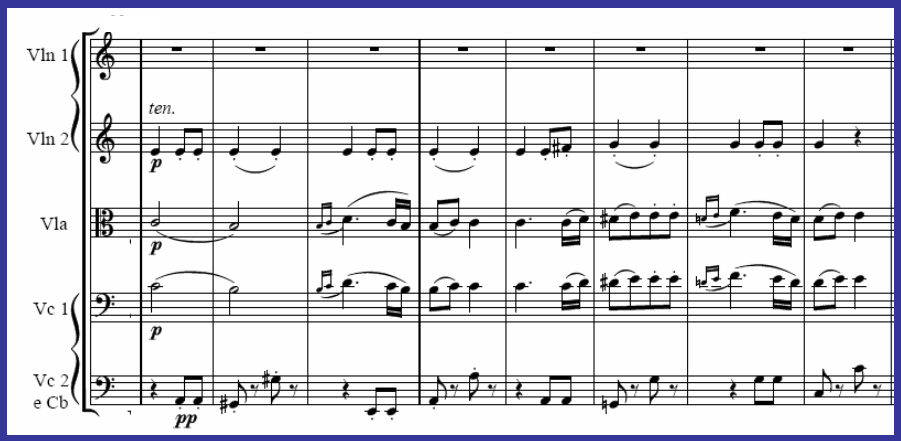
all the way to the big finish

Second movement - *Allegretto*

- After the final A major chord of the *Vivace*, the *Allegretto* opens with an A minor chord introducing a slow march
- Initially we hear just the bare bones of the theme: mainly the rhythm (long-short-short-long) with just a hint of the tune

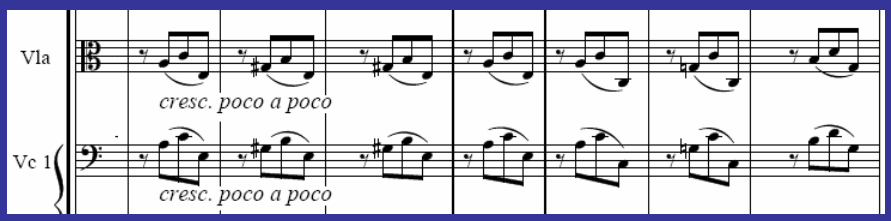


- At Bar 27 we hear the whole tune:

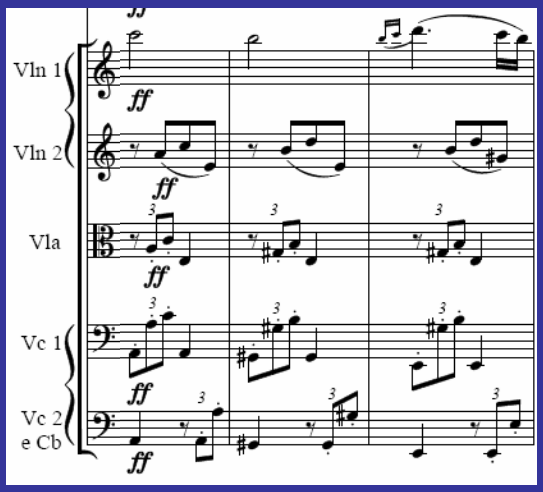


- The movement is mainly a set of variations on this slow march

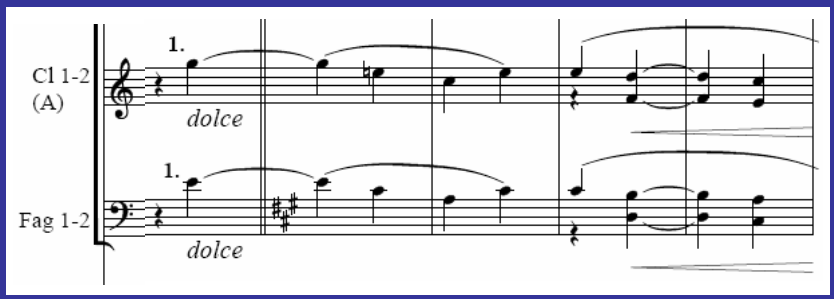
- Beethoven builds on this by adding new features, such as this in the 3rd variation:



- and in the 4th variation he adds triplets as well:

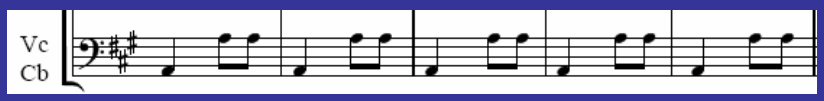


- Some relief from the slow march in the minor key is provided twice by the clarinets and bassoons, back in A major



- …the first 4 notes of which echo the opening of the first movement

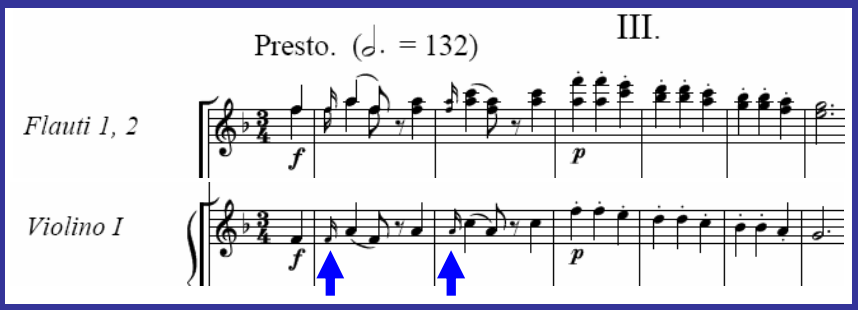
- But even in this major key episode, the cellos still play the slow march rhythm



- The movement winds down at the end, back to the bare bones of the main theme
- This movement was encored by popular demand at the premiere

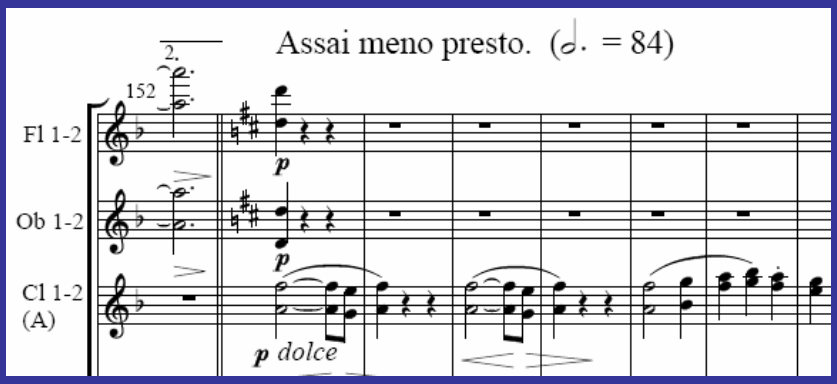
Third movement - *Presto*

- The third movement/scherzo immediately launches into a rapid dance in F major

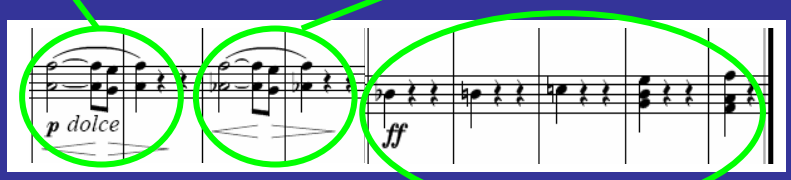


- This is so fast that we are in danger of missing some of the very short notes that are a key part of the rhythm

- The structure is similar to the second movement, interrupting the dance theme twice with a slower trio tune in D major, said to be based on an old pilgrims' hymn:

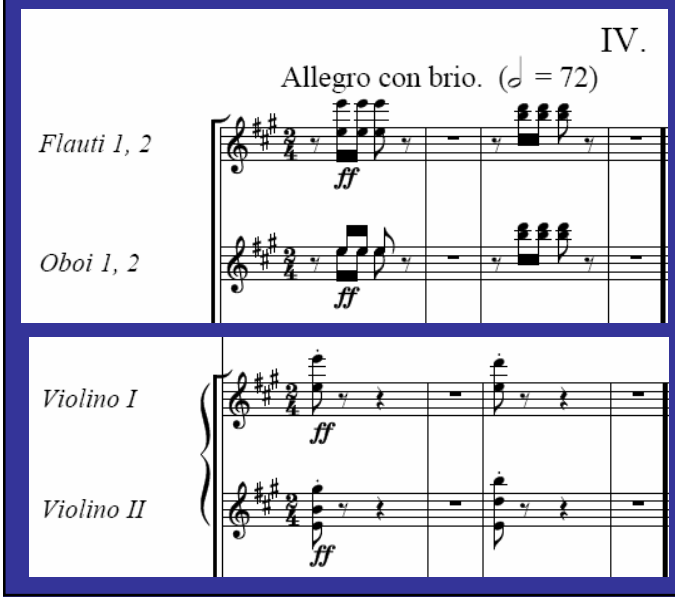


- But there is difference at the end: Beethoven tricks us into thinking that the slow tune is returning for the third time, but it changes to the minor key



- only to abruptly end the movement with five loud chords, which propel us into the fourth movement

Fourth movement – *Allegro con brio*

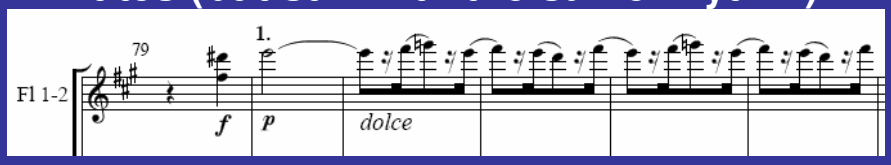


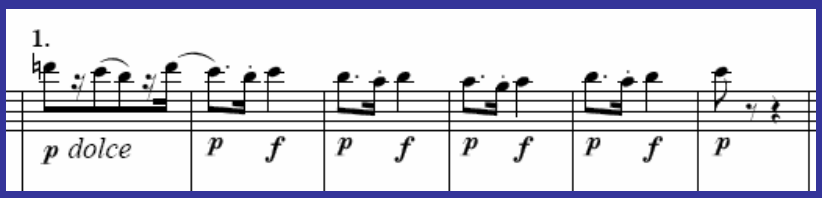
The opening rhythm is a much more rapid version of the long-short-short-long we heard earlier

- Followed by this dance theme, in two main versions, on the violins:

- Another feature is this falling scale theme

- There are occasional quieter respites, such as this graceful theme on the flutes (but still with the same rhythm)





- but these highly energetic themes and instructions such as *ff*, *fff* and *sf* dominate the entire movement.