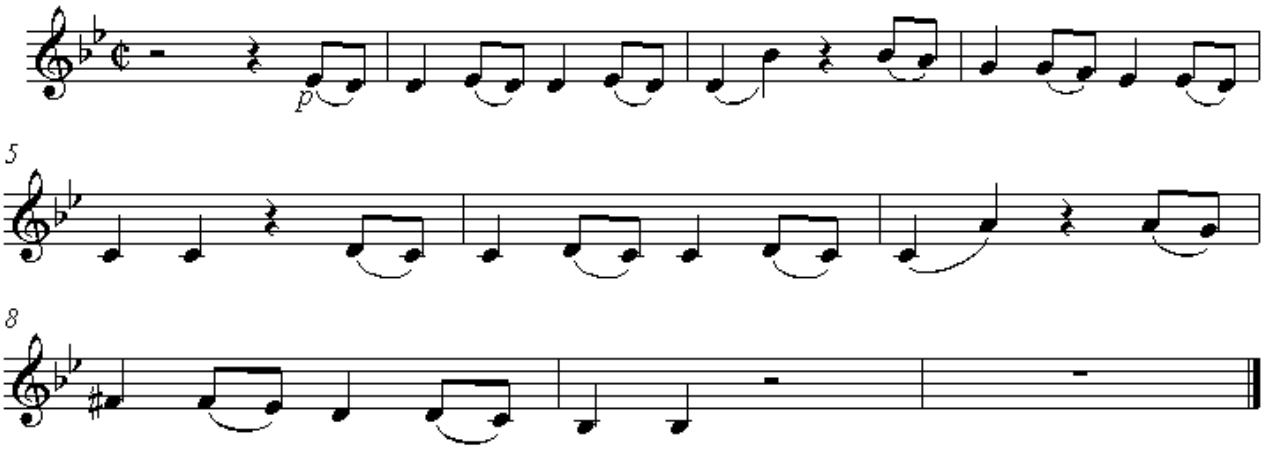
Mozart Symphony 40

I will take a number of short extracts from this piece and give performance suggestions for each.

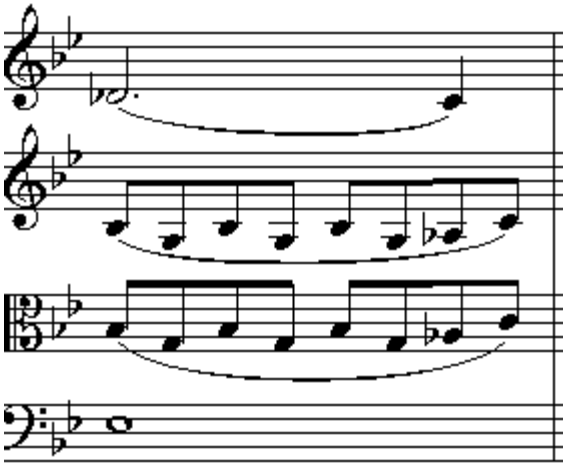
1. 1st Movement: Bars 1-4

Mozart wastes no time here. We are straight into a driving, restless movement. The predominance of G - Bb - G, and the use of the minor 6th suggests anguish. This opening has all of those qualities. Though soft the stings must play into the string with a slow moving bow to produce depth of sound, which alone can give the necessarily painful character. Also, a small swell up and down (especially to 7 and away to 9) points the required rhetorical question and answer structure.



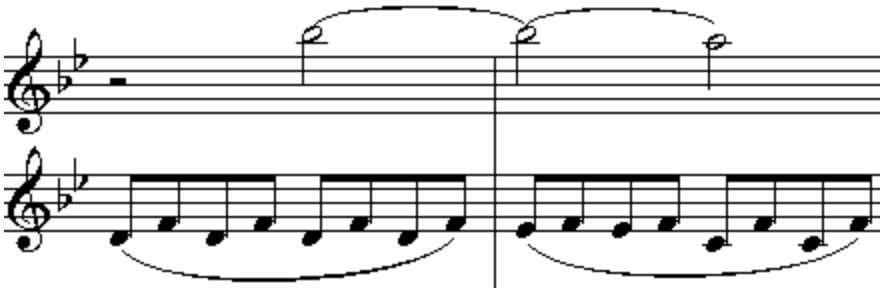
2. 1st Movement: Bar 58

We have been in Bb for the second subject (from bar 44). Suddenly Mozart drops to an Eb7 chord, with a prominent Db, draining away all the colour that has just gone past. The unusual repetition of this bar four times in a row gives a feeling of despair. Hence a diminuendo to the softest possible dynamic seems appropriate.



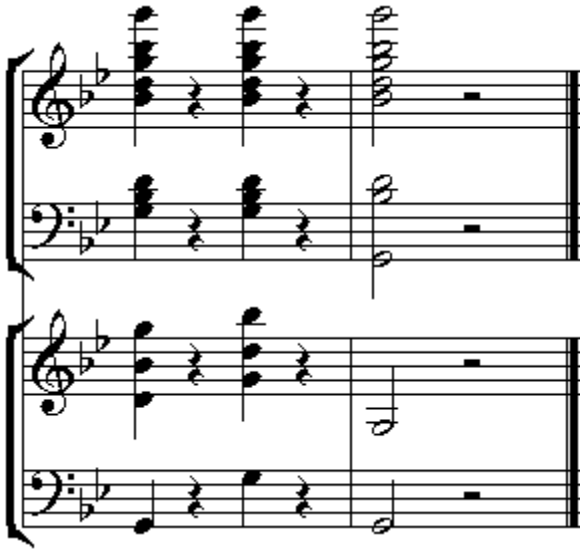
3. 1st Movement: Bars 72f

A simple-as-you-like example of a 4-3 suspension. Crescendo on the first Bb, diminuendo on the second, and shorten the length of the A slightly.



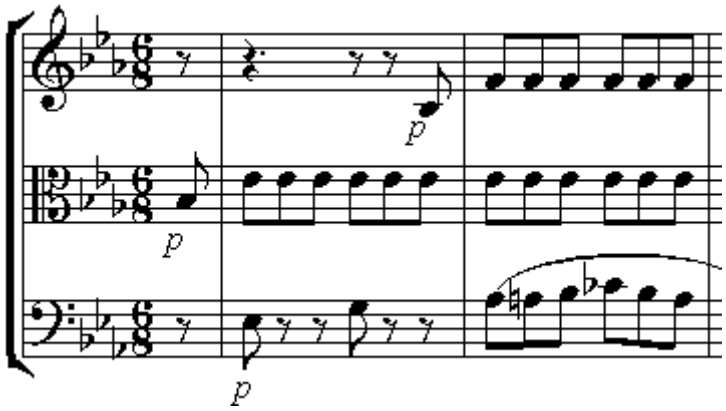
4. 1st Movement: Bars 298f

The final two bars of the movement. Mozart is certainly fond of tagging little ending formulae onto movements, but this one is more than that. It contains, melodically, G - Bb - G, the very essence of the movement. The violins (third stave) should play their chords so that this three note progression is clear.



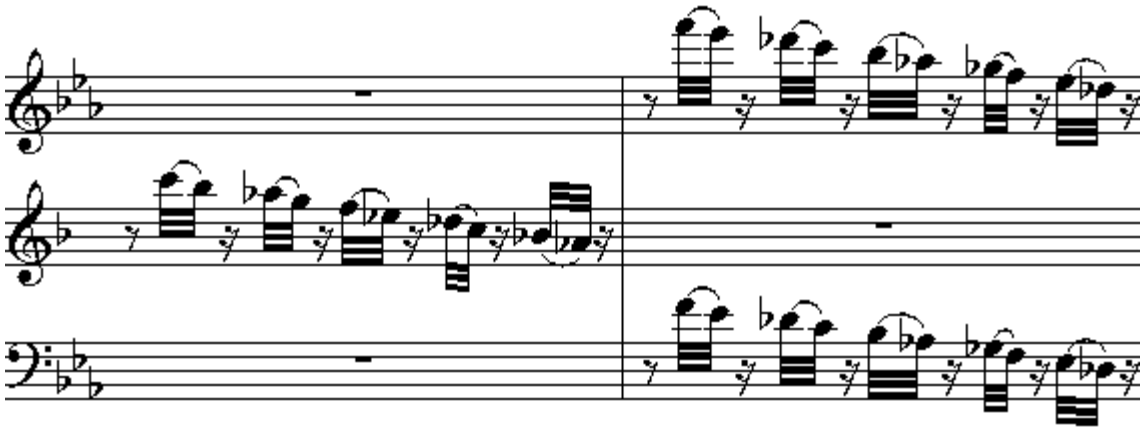
5. 2nd Movement: Bar 2

The return of the minor sixth! Here in the string bass part, also a few bars later in the violins. This use of the Cb gives the movement (which begins in a rather relaxed and pastoral mood) a little twist of the 'blues' (just play it with a C natural instead and you'll hear the difference). Mozart never allows the movement to settle for long into an easy Eb major.



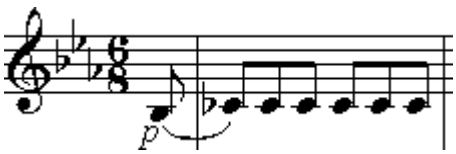
7. 2nd Movement: Bar 31f

The many pairs of demisemiquavers in this movement could be tripped off in a light Mendelssohnian manner. But in the piece's context they contribute to the restlessness. They need playing with serious intent, and almost always as leading to the following bar. They shouldn't sound too 'easy'.



6. 2nd Movement: Bar 53

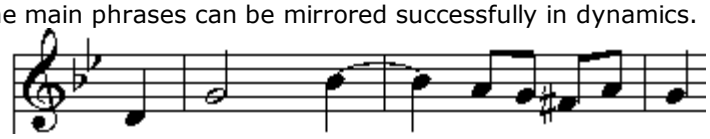
Here is the Cb again. Quiet, with a sense of foreboding - which is enhanced if the notes are played long.



[Back to top]

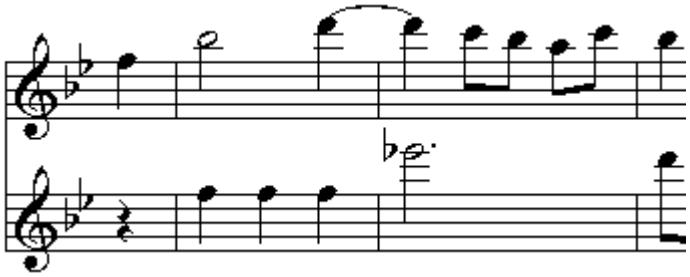
8. 3rd Movement: Bars 1-3

Here there is a sense of heroic protest against the anguish of the world. We are again in G minor. Therefore I feel this should be felt just in three in a bar, and played with the utmost seriousness. The arch shape of the main phrases can be mirrored successfully in dynamics.



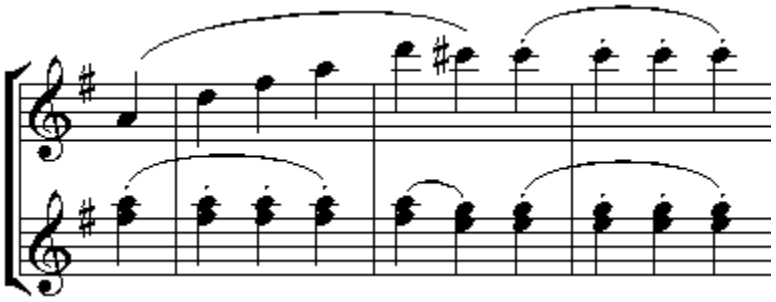
9. 3rd Movement: Bars 15-17

Dissonances abound in the second section, making it a welcome relief when the section dies away quietly. If the wind here play the arch shape dynamics, and the violins go for their top notes, these dissonances will come out nicely (if that's the right word for a dissonance!).



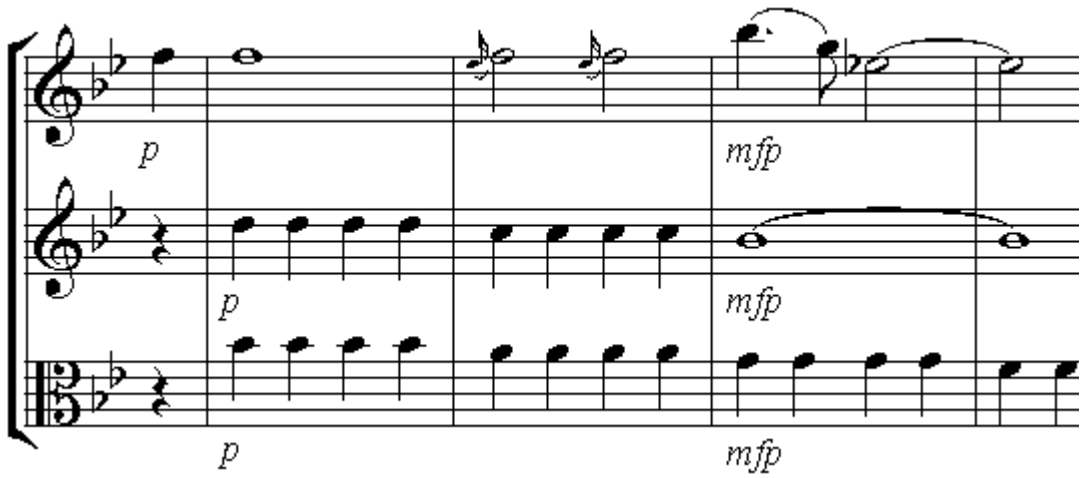
10. Trio: 9-11

The woodwind get this dotted slur phrasing. A friend of mine calls these 'sticky notes'. Play the notes as if completely tied, and then introduce a squeeze onto each one.



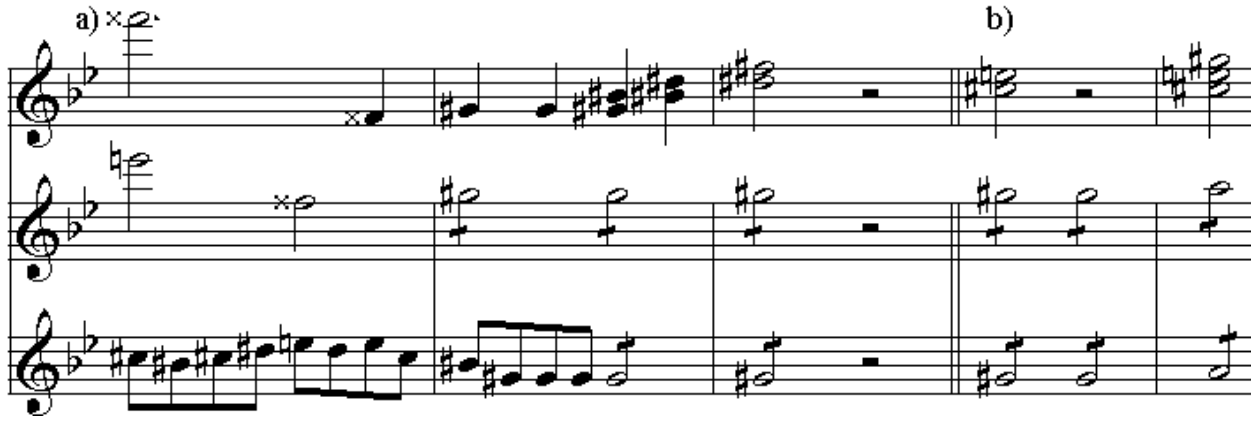
11. 4th Movement: Bars 70-73

One of few genuinely lighter bits in this symphony. The second bar is like an upbeat to the third bar, so should crescendo. The minims should also be light - i.e. not played through.



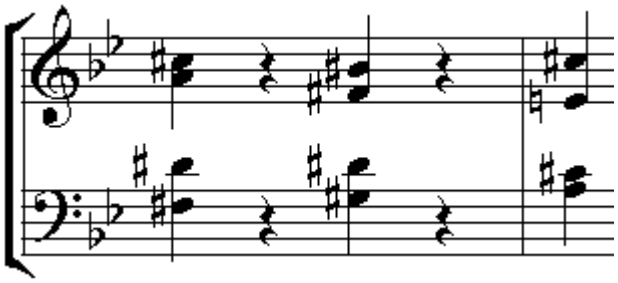
12. 4th Movement: Bars 174ff

a) The violins (2nd line) become a background pedal note at this point and should play softer (though with energy) when they reach the G sharp, so that the wind can come to the foreground.
b) Just a few bars later the violins can come up after the wind and bass parts have finished their melodies to point the dissonance in the second bar shown here.



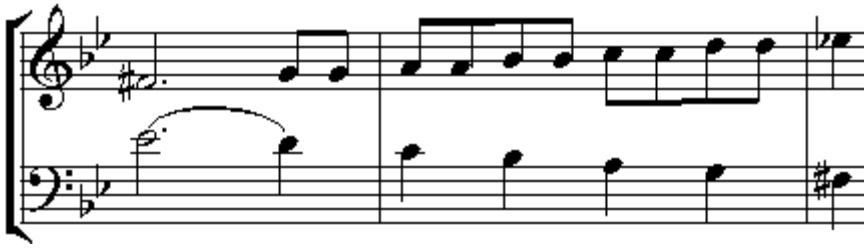
13. 4th Movement: Bars 186f

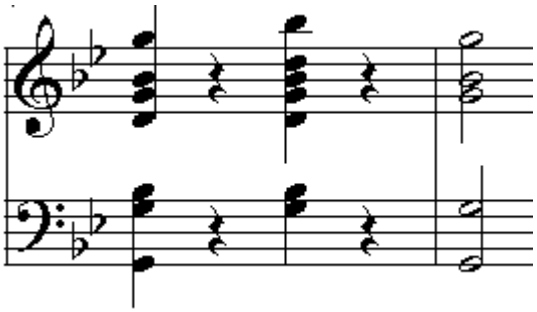
Just a few bars later we have an interrupted cadence, which when played in tempo (as it too often is) sounds rushed - it needs just a hair's breadth of time.



14. 4th Movement: Bars 202-204

With a perfect cadence in Mozart I often like the final chord to have less weight than the preceding dominant. Here, by contrast, the chord is diminished and so a crescendo to it is in order.



15. 4th Movement: Bars 307f

The last two bars of the piece. 1 - 3 - 1 again, just like the first movement (see point 4 above). With this, Mozart takes leave of what Deryck Cooke has called 'This last and finest of his G minor protests against life's terrible sadness.' Little could one guess what a storm of optimism was coming in his next symphony!