

### Rondo

If sonata form is the ultimate expansion of the binary form, rondo form is the same for the ternary form; however, instead of one contrasting section, a rondo will have two or more. The rondo principle is simple: A recurring *refrain* (“A”) alternates with contrasting *episodes* (“B,” “C,” “D,” etc.). Typically, these come in five- or seven- part configurations, but longer rondos are possible. Rondos are common in the final movements of symphonies, string quartets, solo concertos, and multi-movement sonatas. Note that sometimes the refrain may be omitted, and episodes may reappear one or more times. Some common examples are seen below:

**||A||B||A||C||A||**

A standard five-part rondo with two distinct episodes—a very common configuration.

Example: Beethoven, Piano Sonata no. 8, Op. 13, “Pathétique,” ii

**||A||B||A||B’||A||**

A standard five-part rondo with a repeated/varied episode  
Example: Haydn, String Quartet Op. 33, No. 2, “The Joke,” iv

**||A||B||C||A||D||A||**

A seven-part rondo with an omitted refrain  
Example: Haydn, Trio in G Major, Hob. XV:25, Finale

**||A||B||A||C||A||B||C||A||**

A nine-part rondo with an omitted refrain  
Example: Beethoven, Violin Sonata No. 4, Op. 23, Finale

### **Tonal Plan and Other Possibilities**

The refrain will typically be tonally closed and almost always in the tonic key. Episodes will be in contrasting keys, likely either the parallel mode or a closely-related key; they may be tonally open or closed. Because of this, rondos can be continuous or sectional. Repeats of the refrain may be exact repetitions or altered somehow (truncated, varied, re-orchestrated, etc.). There may also be transitions between sections or post-cadential material after any section.

Like ternary forms, rondos of any size may be simple or compound. Compound rondos are common, and, typically, one will find embedded binary forms within many sections of a rondo. Because of this, analyzing a rondo may be treacherous because of the many repeat signs.

## Sonata-Rondo

The sonata-rondo is a *hybrid* form between sonata and rondo. This form operates like a seven-part rondo (with alternating refrains/episodes), but incorporate principles of sonata form (a theme played first in a “wrong” key and later in the home key). This is a common configuration for seven-part rondos and has been described in detail as a Type 4 Sonata by Hepokoski and Darcy.<sup>1</sup> A more general description can be seen below:

**||A||B||A||C||A||B'||A||**

1. “A” takes the place of the primary theme (called the P-refrain (Prf), in this case).
2. There is an additional statement of “A” at the end, called the coda refrain. Typically, it will be shorter than other iterations of the refrain.
3. “B” and “B-prime” take the place of the secondary theme and will follow the same tonal plan as sonata form. (V → I or III → I).
4. “C” takes the place of the development. The composer may use material from the exposition (“A” and “B” in this case), making it closer to a sonata, or completely new material, erring towards rondo.

There is an important difference between sonata and sonata-rondo form: retransitions to the “A” section (or primary theme). Because each refrain will be in the tonic key, there may be retransitional material leading back to each “A” section. This is most important after “C” and the first “B” section because they will typically be in different keys than “A.” “C” will typically end on a half-cadence in the home key.

Examples: Beethoven, Piano Sonata no. 8, Op. 13, “Pathetique,” iii  
Mozart, Piano Sonata no. 13 in Bb-major, K. 333, iii



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<sup>1</sup> Hepokoski, James and Warren Darcy. *Elements of Sonata Theory*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006: 388–428.

<sup>2</sup> One of the finest cats I’ve ever met, named Rondo.