

Rondo Forms

Rondo types may be considered expanded versions of ternary form in which:

- (1) there are often more than one contrasting section (C, D, etc. in addition to B) alternating with the A section
- (2) the contrasting sections have greater autonomy in harmony and sometimes in melody, and
- (3) style usually, although NOT ALWAYS, plays a greater role; the rondo being associated with the last movement of Classical period works has a light, cheerful character – there are, too, instances of rondo types being more “profound” in character as well.

The Basic Types of Rondo (in conjunction with common terminology) are:

First Rondo --- ABA (ternary form itself)

Second Rondo or Small Rondo --- A B A B A OR xA B A C A

Third Rondo or Classical Rondo --- A B A C A B A

Sonata Rondo --- same as classical rondo but with the C section being a development section.

Section Characteristics:

A Sections (sometimes referred to as the “Refrain”) usually are highly memorable and melodious, are in the tonic key, and are harmonically closed. Exceptions to this may involve modulatory changes towards the end of A sections other than the first one. Typically, the first A section is closed and the others are closed also but with modulatory extensions.

B, C, etc. Sections (sometimes referred to as “Couplets” or “Episodes”) may be autonomous thematically or derived from the thematic material (highly varied) from the A section, are in keys other than the tonic, and are harmonically open. They are often concluded with a retransition to the tonic key, preparing the return of the following A section.

C sections are usually the largest single section of the Classical Rondo, involving more development of material motivically, often with a change of key signature and/or tempo.

The Baroque Rondeau:

An A B A C A D A form that is often only written out as A B C D, it being understood that the A sections are to be placed between the contrasting sections. There is less continuity between sections than in the Classic period Rondo owing to more complete cadences at the end of each sections as well as (frequently) even greater autonomy of melodic material between sections.

The Rondo after Classic Period:

Rarer in the Romantic period, at which time the form was considered stale, it is to be found most often in the Sonata Rondo hybrid form and in the works of the “classical” Johannes Brahms.