

## Rondo form

1. Rondo form may be thought of as an **extension of ternary form**. A B A, with the addition of more contrasting sections and more returns of A, becomes A B A C A, A B A B' A, A B A' C A'', A B A C A B' A, A B A C A D A, or some similar design. Notice that there are thus **five-part rondos** and **seven-part rondos**. The most important components of any rondo are the **rondo theme** and the **digressions**.

2. Common forms:	5-part rondo	7-part rondo
	A B A C A	A B A C A B' A
	A B A B' A	A B A C A D A
	T O T O T	T O T O T T T

A is the *rondo theme*. B - D are *digressions*. T represents the tonic key. O represents some other key.

3. **Characteristics of the "A" or rondo theme (also called the refrain):**
- Normally, each recurrence of the rondo theme is in the **tonic key**.
  - The rondo theme is usually in a closed form—that is, some type of period structure or part-form (e.g., binary, or a b a) that concludes with a perfect authentic cadence.
  - The rondo theme sometimes returns in varied form (some elements remain fixed while others are varied) and/or is shortened. This is to provide some variety in its many recurrences.
  - The rondo theme usually has easily recognizable features (melody, rhythm, and so forth).
  - The rondo theme may be connected to the next section by some type of modulatory *transition*.
4. **Characteristics of the digressions (also called *couplets* or *episodes*):**
- "Digressions" refers to the contrasting sections, which may be thematic or developmental in character.
  - The digressions are usually in near-related keys, with the first digression typically in the dominant key (or the mediant key if starting in minor). Keys may be more varied in the 19th-century rondo.
  - Digressions may be motivically or thematically related to the rondo theme.
  - The second digression frequently is longer than the first digression.
  - The second digression often is in a different mode that is parallel to the overall tonic (e.g., the parallel minor).
  - Digressions may be connected to the rondo theme by a *retransition* (that is, a modulatory transition *back to* the tonic key).
5. **Characteristics of the coda (if present; not used extensively in *early* Classical works):**
- The coda may be either all one long section or it may be divided into smaller units or subsections.
  - The coda sometimes begins in a key other than the overall tonic, but then modulates back quickly and closes in the tonic key.

6. The following diagram shows a "typical" (but by no means the **only**) 7-part rondo, including common key areas for the digressions:

Sections:	A	B	A	C	A	B'	A	Coda
	rondo th.	digress.	rondo th.	digress.	rondo th.	digress.	rondo th.	
M mode:	I	V	I	i (iii, IV, vi)	I	I	I	I
m mode:	i	III (v)	i	i (iv, VI)	i	i	i	i

Note that the diagram omits possible transitions (*from* tonic to another key) and retransitions (*from* some other key *back to* the tonic key).

## 7. Points to consider when analyzing rondos:

- Large-scale tonal scheme; tonal relationships of digressions to rondo theme.
- The form and design of the rondo theme (thematic content, tonal scheme, and so forth).
- The form and design of each digression; possible motivic or thematic connections between digressions; possible motivic or thematic connections to the rondo theme.
- The nature of the transitions and retransitions—how do they “get from” and “get to” in terms of melodic and harmonic features? Are certain developmental techniques used? [Sequence is a common occurrence in transitional passages.] Does the transition end with a strong cadence, or is the connection with what follows essentially “seamless”?
- The design of the coda (if present); possible motivic or thematic connections with previous material.

## 8. Aesthetic considerations:

As with all formal types that came to maturity in the Classical period, rondo form emphasizes the musical tension inherent in **dramatic contrast**. The digressions may differ from the rondo theme in thematic content, key and/or mode, length, texture, internal form, and so on. The difference may be limited to only a couple of musical elements, or there may be dramatic, striking changes in all the musical elements. During the Classical and early Romantic periods, rondo form often “aspired” to be like sonata form—there are often noticeable similarities between sonata developments and rondo digressions (fragmentation, sequence, modulation, sometimes dominant prolongations at the end which lead to a dramatic return of the tonic). Another aspect of the sonata principle is that material occurring in some non-tonic key may recur later in the tonic key (see the information about digressions).

## 9. A quick introduction to sonata-rondo form

- As the 18th century progressed, rondo form became caught up in the spirit of sonata “style,” and as a result the structural principles of sonata-allegro form began to be merged with the rondo design. The result is a hybrid form called **sonata-rondo** form, which we will discuss in more detail later in the semester.
- The idea of recapitulation is found in the seven-part rondo:

					<i>Recap.</i>		<i>(Coda)</i>
section:	A	B	A	C	A	B'	A
key relationship:	I	V	I	x	I	I	I

- Recapitulation plus development (instead of C) is found in the sonata-rondo:

A	B	A	Development (instead of C)	A	B'	A	(+ Coda)
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- Examples: Beethoven's *Piano Sonata in C minor*, Op. 13, “Pathétique,” mvt. III  
Mozart's *Piano Sonata in B<sup>b</sup> Major*, K. 333, mvt. III
- As you might have gathered from the examples cited, sonata-rondo form and rondo form are most often found in the *final* movements of sonatas, string quartets, concerti, and symphonies.