

# THE RONDO FORM

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Beethoven: *Piano Sonata, Op. 13 (II)*

The heart of a rondo is the refrain itself. It is usually a well-defined and harmonically complete melody, often a double period, and sometimes a rounded binary or ternary form. **THE REFRAIN**

The refrain in Beethoven's Adagio is a fluid, lyrical, major-mode melody comprising two eight-measure phrases, the second varied only in register (the melody is an octave higher) and in texture (an extra figural line is added in the alto register). Both phrases end with authentic cadences.

Illustration 9.3 Beethoven: *Piano Sonata, Op. 13 (II, mm. 1-16)*

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**THE FIRST EPISODE**

The first episode of a rondo (the B section) begins upon completion of the refrain, sometimes preceded by a transition. The episode may be a periodic melody like the refrain, or it may involve scalar patterns, arpeggiations, or short motivic fragments. It is usually in a related key.

The first episode of Beethoven's Adagio is a contrasting melody which begins, without transition, in the relative minor key (m. 17) and comes to a cadence in the dominant (m. 23). A seven-measure phrase twice extended cadentially, it is followed by a two-measure retransition to the tonic (mm. 27-28). Notice how the actual preparation for the tonic return is delayed until the last possible moment. It is not until the D $\flat$  is sounded at the very end of m. 28 (creating the V $\flat$ ) that the key of A $\flat$  is again indicated.

Illustration 9.4 Beethoven: *Piano Sonata, Op. 13 (II, mm. 17-28)*

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The return of the refrain is frequently abbreviated and sometimes varied but is almost always in the tonic. The return of Beethoven's refrain is an exact restatement of the first eight measures and leads directly into the second episode. **THE FIRST RETURN**

Illustration 9.5 Beethoven: *Piano Sonata, Op. 13 (II, mm. 29-36)*

The second episode (the C section) is usually the longest, the most complex, and the most tonally distant digression. It may be thematic, or it may develop previous material and explore various tonal regions such as the parallel key, the subdominant, or (especially in Haydn's and Beethoven's rondos) a chromatic-third relationship. It often ends with a substantial retransition to prepare harmonically for the refrain. **THE SECOND EPISODE**

The second episode of Beethoven's Adagio is thematic and begins, without transition, in the parallel minor key (a $\flat$ ). A new rhythmic element—the sixteenth-note triplet—is introduced. An enharmonic common-chord modulation to E occurs at mm. 41-44. (See page 121 for a detailed discussion of this passage.) A dramatic peak in the movement, these measures contain a dynamic *crescendo* and a rise to a melodic high point underscored by emphatic articulation. A three-measure retransition in mm. 48-50 leads smoothly back to A $\flat$  by way of a diminished seventh chord.

Illustration 9.6 Beethoven: *Piano Sonata, Op. 13 (II, mm. 37-50)*

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**2nd Episode**

# Rondo Form P.2

As with the first return of the refrain, the second return may be shortened or otherwise varied, but it is almost always in the home key.

THE SECOND RETURN (5)

The second and final return in Beethoven's Adagio is a complete restatement of the refrain, but with a continuation of the triplet accompaniment first introduced in the second episode. By this means, Beethoven has integrated elements from the two sections.

Illustration 9.7 Beethoven: Piano Sonata, Op. 13 (II, mm. 51-66)

(Adagio cantabile)

(6)

In this work, a seven-measure coda follows the final refrain. As with many codas, it is nothing more than an elaborate cadential extension, repeating the formula V-I in the following manner.

Illustration 9.8

Coda

Illustration 9.9 Beethoven: Piano Sonata, Op. 13 (II, Coda: mm. 66-end)

(Adagio cantabile)

A Refrain (Ab) | B 1st Episode (F) | A' (1) 1st Return Refrain' (Ab HC) | C 2nd Episode (Eb) | A'' (2) 2nd Return Refrain'' (E) | Coda (Fb, VI)

Measure numbers: 16, 28, 36, (47) 50, 66.

Key signatures: Ab, F, Eb, E, Fb, VI.