

Spring Rondo

Note by the composer

Spring Rondo began as a work for brass quartet, which I started during my last year at Harvard and finished during my first year of grad school at UW. It grew from its initial drumming/dancing motif, which just came to me one day (as so many do). After I started my service in the USAF Band in DC, a quartet of colleagues read through it. The verdict: it required too much stamina—especially for the first trumpet. As it had many passages in a fairly full texture, I decided to reshape and score it for concert band. Col. Arnald Gabriel took it up and premiered it with the band at the Dept. of State Auditorium. The premiere was a nice success.

In character, Spring Rondo is a lively, colorful, euphonious, fast-dancing, rhythmic piece with changing polymeters (uneven rhythms/meters) and a hot ending. It dances and sings with the exuberant release of energy that Spring always triggers in my soul. The scoring uses the full band a lot but also shows off various choirs and instrumental mixtures in between.

The musical form is an invention of my own (though Mahler introduced a form something like it in the finale of his Symphony No. 7), a varied (some would say disfigured) rondo form. In the classical rondo (think Mozart), the rondo theme starts the piece, followed by a second theme in a different character and key, then the rondo theme returns as before, then another new theme, the rondo theme again, and so on to the end. Typically at least ABACADA_Coda. But I distort this plan by making each return of the rondo theme a *variation* on the original, varied more extremely on each return, sometimes even in a slower tempo and affect. Only near the end does the rondo theme return in its original happy, lively opening guise, which at that point in the scheme gives it an effect more like the welcome “recap” in a sonata form.

Originally the last section of the piece, soon after the rondo return, sort of sputtered out a little—it devolved into a series of scattered, thinly-scored episodes retracing fragments of previous ideas, then slowed and quieted, and only at the very end suddenly picked up to the flashy ending. (A bit like the end of Beethoven’s Fourth Symphony—but less successfully.) On the advice of a master composer (my dad), who felt that the piece’s appealing momentum was regrettably lost well before the end, I later wrote a new ending that simply sustains the exuberant energy of the start once it returns and, using only extensions of the rondo theme, drives all the way to the end.