

HKDSE Music – Listening (Form 4)  
Week 5 – Classical String Quartets

🎵 Beethoven, String Quartet No. 4 in C minor, Op. 18 No. 4

Fourth Movement – Rondo Form

Opening refrain

**A**

antecedent phrase      consequent phrase

Allegretto

**B**      **A**

V (IC)      I (PC)

**Refrain 1** (bars 1–16)

- The **refrain** of the rondo form functions like the main theme, recurring at multiple locations throughout the movement with various contrasting **episodes** interspersed in between.
- The refrain is structure in a **rounded-binary form**:
  - **Part A** (bars 1–8): The first 8 bars form a pair of **symmetrical** phrases, an **antecedent phrase** (bars 1–4) followed a **consequent phrase** (bars 5–8). The antecedent ends on an **imperfect cadence** (or **half cadence**), while the consequent concludes with a **perfect cadence** (or **perfect authentic cadence**) in the dominant key of G minor.
  - **Part B** (bars 9–12): This part contrasts with the previous passage, introducing a new melodic idea that undergoes a descending **harmonic sequence** (circle-of-fifth sequence

/ descending fifth sequence); **syncopation** occurs on the last beat as a result of the *sforzandos* and the tie over the bar line; this four-bar phrase ends on an **imperfect cadence** (half cadence), and the last note is prolonged by a fermata, arresting the further continuation of the theme.

- **Part A** (bars 13–16): Materials from the first A section is brought back as a conclusion. The last two bars are slightly altered to bring about a **perfect cadence** (or **perfect authentic cadence**) in the home key of C minor.
- This refrain is characterized by many **staccato** notes, projecting an energetic and sometimes aggressive character. There is also great **dynamic contrast**, fluctuating constantly between *piano* and *forte*.

### Episode 1



### **Episode 1** (bars 17–40)

- The first episode begins immediately in the **submediant key** of Ab major.
- It features a lyrical melody played by the **second violin**. This melody begins with an **ascending leap** of a perfect fourth, followed by a **stepwise motion** up and down the Ab-major scale. The melody passes onto the **first violin** during the second half of the phrase.
- The rhythm is slower compared to the opening refrain due to the **longer note values**, thereby evoking a calmer and peaceful atmosphere.
- This episode is also structured in a **rounded binary form**, with a return of the A section in the second half.

### Refrain 2

### Refrain 2 (bars 41–72)

- The first return of the refrain is almost the same as the opening, except for the **written-out repeats** of each half of the rounded binary form. During these written-out repeats, the music gets more intense via the addition of shorter rhythmic values, more animated melodic line and thickening of texture.

### Episode 2

### Episode 2 (bars 73–86)

- The opening motif – a stepwise ascending fourth (or a fifth in the first violin) – seems to be an **expansion** of the opening motive of the refrain, Eb–F–G, which is a third.
- The beginning of this episode is a cascade of **imitative entries**, entering one after the another in close succession
- The key changes C major – the **parallel major** of the home key C minor.
- The second half of the opening phrase has similar pattern of articulation as in the refrain – a slurred two-note figure followed by two staccato notes.
- Part A of this episode **modulates** to the dominant key (G major). Part B continues in G major before reverting back to C major at the end.

### Refrain 3

### Refrain 3 (bars 87–110)

- This refrain is slightly **varied** from the previous two versions. Most notable is the passing of the melodic line from the **second violin** to the **first violin** up an octave in the first two bars.

### Episode 3

### Episode 3 (bars 110–162)

- This episode begins with materials from the **episode 2** – a series of ascending third motives that are later turned into an **arpeggiated** figure.
- In bar 117 onward, the melody from **episode 1** reappears in the tonic major (C major). This formal procedure of restating the theme first from a modulated key to the tonic key is akin to the **second theme** in a sonata-form movement.
- Different from the previous episode 1, the main melody is performed by one instrument throughout each phrase (the second violin, then the first violin).
- The cadence at the end of the theme is **elided** (i.e. overlapped with the entrance of the following phrase). From bar 137 onward, the key vacillates between C major and C minor, followed by a tonal digression into the relative major (Eb major) in bars 144–5.
- This episode eventually arrives on dominant pedal (bars 153–162), in anticipation of the return of the refrain.

### Refrain 4

### Refrain 4 (bars 163–217)

- This refrain is in a much faster tempo than before (“**Prestissimo**”). The principal melody remains the same, but the accompanimental chords become **syncopated**. Dynamic also becomes louder (**fortissimo**). The brings about an exhilarating end to this movement as well as the entire string quartet.
- The original refrain melody ends with a **perfect cadence** (or **perfect authentic cadence**) in bar 178. After that a series of codetta (post-cadential modules) are added to rearticulate the final cadence multiple times, reinforcing the sense of finality.
- As a typical Beethovenian whimsical twist, the dynamic suddenly drops to *piano* (or *pianissimo*) from bar 200 onward. The key switches back to C major (with the E natural), but the presence of Ab reminds us of the minor mode. This **ambivalence** between major and minor persists till the very end, where the ascending-fourth motive reappears in quick succession played by all four string instruments **in unison**. (This motive can be part of the C major scale and the C melodic minor scale.)

### Overall formal structure

#### SONATA-RONDO

| EXPOSITION          |                           | DEVELOPMENT    |                         | RECAPITULATION |                | CODA           |      |
|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------|
| Refrain 1<br>A      | Episode 1<br>B            | Refrain 2<br>A | Episode 2<br>C          | Refrain 3<br>A | Episode 3<br>B | Refrain 4<br>A | Coda |
| THEMES: First theme | Second theme              | First theme    | Development / New theme | First theme    | Second theme   | First theme    |      |
| Keys: Tonic key     | Dominant / relative minor | Tonic key      | Various keys            | Tonic key      | Tonic key      | Tonic key      |      |