

## Web Feature 22.1

### The Baroque *rondeau*

The term *rondeau* originated as a form of poetry and music in France in the Middle Ages. One form, dating from the thirteenth century, was an eight-line poem; lines 1 and 2 were repeated for the last two lines, and line 1 was also repeated in the fourth line. The first two lines then formed a kind of **refrain** (a repeating passage) that was reprised at the end and partially reprised in the middle. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the refrain came to be expanded, with the result of lengthening the poem: a three-line refrain was called a *tercet*, a four-line refrain a *quatrain*, and there were even refrains with five lines (called a *cinquain*). In the recitation of these poems, music would be composed for the refrains only.

The French Baroque *rondeau*, which flourished in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, bears little resemblance to its medieval forerunner, though perhaps the presence of the recurring refrain earned it the name. It was an instrumental form characterized by the alternation of the refrain (which by now had become, musically, a short recurring passage in the tonic, made self-sufficient by its conclusion on a perfect authentic cadence) with contrasting sections called **couplets**. Each couplet usually emphasized a different key, closely related to the tonic, in turn. The number of couplets varied according to the piece; most often there were three or four. A three-couplet *rondeau*, then, would have the form ABACADA (where *A* represents the refrain). Usually in the printed music the refrain would be printed only at the beginning, with *da capo* or *rondeau* signs used at the ends of the couplets to save space.

François Couperin (1668–1733) was a contemporary of Bach's who composed twenty-seven *ordres* (suites) for harpsichord as well as vocal and chamber music. Some of his harpsichord compositions bear fanciful or quizzical titles; such is the case with "Les Baricades Mistérieuses" (The Mysterious Barricades), which was composed in 1717. The complete score is shown in Web Example 22.1.

**Vivement**

*Rondeau*

5

9 1. 2.

*Fin* *1<sup>er</sup> Couplet*

14

18

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a piece titled 'Rondeau' in bass clef, 3/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Vivement'. The score is written in a grand staff with a single bass clef. It consists of five systems of music. The first system starts with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket. The second system continues the first ending. The third system has a first ending bracket with two endings, followed by a double bar line and the word 'Fin'. The fourth system begins with the '1<sup>er</sup> Couplet' and contains measures 14-17. The fifth system contains measures 18-21. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a fermata over the final note.

The musical score is presented in five systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piece is in 3/4 time and features a melodic line with various ornaments and repeat signs, and a piano accompaniment.

- System 1 (Measures 22-25):** The melodic line begins with a mordent over the first measure. A repeat sign with a double bar line and a fermata is placed over measures 23 and 24. The piano accompaniment consists of a simple harmonic progression.
- System 2 (Measures 26-29):** The melodic line continues with a mordent over the first measure. The piano accompaniment continues with a similar harmonic progression.
- System 3 (Measures 30-33):** The melodic line features a mordent over the first measure and a repeat sign with a double bar line and a fermata over measures 31 and 32. The piano accompaniment continues.
- System 4 (Measures 34-37):** The melodic line continues with a mordent over the first measure. The piano accompaniment continues.
- System 5 (Measures 38-41):** The melodic line continues with a mordent over the first measure. The piano accompaniment continues.

Section labels are placed below the piano part: *Rondeau* (measures 22-25), *2<sup>e</sup> Couplet* (measures 26-29), *Rondeau* (measures 30-33), and *3<sup>e</sup> Couplet* (measures 34-37).

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the piece "Les Baricades Mistérieuses" by Couperin. Each system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system starts at measure 42, the second at measure 46, and the third at measure 50. The notation is characterized by a consistent arpeggiated texture in the right hand, with chords broken up into eighth and sixteenth notes. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The piece concludes at measure 51 with a double bar line and a section symbol (§). The word "Rondeau" is written in the right hand staff of the final system.

**Web Example 22.1.** Couperin, “Les Baricades Mistérieuses.”

This arpeggiated texture also carries over to the couplets, so that at least as far as texture is concerned there might appear to be minimal distinction between the sections. Contrast is achieved largely by slight changes of register (the couplets tend to be somewhat higher in pitch) and, especially, in key areas. The first couplet (measures 9–23), for example, emphasizes the dominant, F major; the second couplet (measures 24–30), c minor; and the third couplet (measures 31–52) modulates by sequences before settling into E♭ major (measures 46–51). Note that whereas the refrain is a section of fixed length and content, the couplets are of varying lengths and degrees of tonal instability; the last couplet is the longest and tends to modulate the most. This tendency

of saving the most “adventurous” music for the final couplet will recur in some Classic-era rondos.