

WTC I/4 in C# minor – Prelude

The C# minor prelude is based on motivic development at different levels, from faithful imitation and sequencing to partial quotation and rather free adaptation. Its texture is polyphonic without strict part writing. The beginning and the end are written in four voices, occasionally splitting to five; however, large portions in between feature only three or even two parts, without clearly definable exits and re-entries of the voices.

The first cadence is deceptive, with a conclusion on the downbeat of m. 5: after the D⁷ harmony in mm. 3-4, the melodic progression in all voices seems to announce the return to a tonic chord, which would consist of C#/E/G#/C#. However, the bass does not resolve but remains tied, and the alto rises to A instead of remaining on G#. The resulting chord is thus a polytonal mixture of the tonic and the chord on step VI.¹ The nature of this chord makes it very unlikely that this cadential close is intended as a structural caesura. The design of the left-hand part corroborates this by featuring descending double sixths in mm. 5-7 as an extension of the sixth in which the two lower voices ended the cadence.

The harmonic progression then modulates to the relative key E major and draws to a close on the downbeat of m. 8. Although the feeling of a structural close will be much stronger a few measures later owing to the pronounced cadential formula there, this perfect resolution into the related key has to be regarded as structurally relevant, particularly since it coincides with the completion of a melodic idea. The more obvious caesura after the middle beat of m. 14 marks the close of the following structural unit with a cadence in G# minor. A shorter fourth section consists exclusively of three dominant-seventh chords and their resolutions: mm. 15-20 = F#⁷/B major, G#⁷/C# minor, C#⁷/F# minor. This leads to the longest section in this composition: a harmonic progression with several near-cadences thwarted by last-minute deviations. As if in symmetry to the beginning there is another deceptive cadence in m. 35, delaying the perfect cadence, which materializes only in the prelude's final measure.

The analogous harmonic structure of the two-measure subphrases in mm. 15-20 apart, there are several structural correspondences in this prelude: U: mm. 5-8₁ ≈ 20₄-23₄ transposed a third lower, thus transforming

¹C# E G# + A C# E. Note that this combination of pitches is exactly the same as that in the final interrupted cadence of the C# minor fugue—compare fugue m. 112 with prelude m. 5.

the cadence in E major to one in C# minor. This return to the tonic passes almost unnoticed because of Bach's decision to continue and develop the same melodic idea throughout the next measures. Moreover, mm. 8-10 recur in mm. 23-25, transposed and with the middle and lower voices varied. (See also the remote resemblances in the following measures.)

The character of the piece is calm, yet the time signature might present a pitfall in terms of tempo: the calm character expresses itself by means of a half-measure pulse. (The harmonic tempo, proceeding exclusively in half-measure steps, supports this pace.) While these pulses should convey a generously swinging motion, the actual tempo of the quarter-notes is not really slow. The appropriate articulation is an overall legato not even interrupted for cadential-bass formulas since Bach writes all of them explicitly with tied notes (see e.g. mm. 13, 34, and 38).

There are several ornaments. The opening phrase features arpeggiated chords, grace-note groups, single grace notes, and a mordent. The arpeggios and the grace-note pairs represent basically the same musical feature; both are played *on* the beat and fast. The notes are sustained whenever they are essential to fill the chord (as in mm. 1, 3, and 12); they sound equally fast but unsustained whenever they contain pitches also provided for by other voices (as in mm. 2, 4, and 8). The single grace-notes (see mm. 2 and 4) are appoggiaturas since they represent harmonies different from the main notes, and must be played with due weight. Appearing in the context of imitating voices, in which case the rules of polyphony require the retreating voice to give way to the imitating one, these appoggiaturas are best resolved after one quarter-note each. The mordent, approached stepwise by the appoggiatura, begins on the main note and consists of a single three-note shake. Both the grace-note (appoggiatura) and the mordent on the main note (resolution) should be transferred to all recurrences of the same motif, wherever harmonic and structural progressions allow this.²

The grace-notes in the second phrase are somewhat more problematic. Harmonically, they represent appoggiaturas and thus require time. Melodically, they interrupt the smooth scalar motion and create note repetition. Rhythmically, they would have to be played in 16th-notes. Perhaps most importantly in terms of the impact on the character of the prelude: as this splitting of an eighth-note falls on the final note of a motif, an impression of congestion arises together with a blur of the phrasing. These reasons combined suggest that it may be advisable to do without these ornaments.

²Left hand m. 3 add grace-note A on beat 1, mordent on G# beat 2, right hand m. 4 add mordent on D#, and left hand m. 9 add grace-note C#, mordent on B#.

The third phrase introduces a number of new ornaments. In m. 11, the appoggiatura in the middle voice resolves on the second eighth-note; the inverted mordent uses A#-G#-A#. As the second half of the measure is a sequence of the first half, one might consider adding the grace-note E before the D#. Whether Bach left it out purposefully to avoid the resulting pitch progression E-D#-E#, or whether it is one of the many corresponding segments in which ornamentation is optional, is hard to decide. In m. 13, the grace-note is also one eighth-note long, and the turn should sound B-A#-G#-A# in regular 16th-notes.

Within the fourth phrase, the varied sequence mentioned above appears without any of the ornaments that decorated the model. Performers may wish to consider adding the three inverted mordents:

- on C# (U: m. 16₆, corresponding with that on B in m. 14₆),
- on G# (L: m. 17₄, corresponding with that on F# in M: m. 15₄),
- on C# (L: m. 18₁, corresponding with that on B in L: m. 16₁).

In the fifth section, the eighth-note graces (U: mm. 21-23) should be dealt with along the same lines as those in mm. 5-8. In mm. 26-28, two of the three ascending lines in the bass end with an inverted mordent, and the same ornament should probably be added on F# in m. 28. In m. 29, the compound symbol above the treble note B# indicates a mordent preceded by an appoggiatura (see the written-out example of the vertical stroke + mordent that Bach gives in the Table of Ornaments, reprinted in all *Urtext* editions). The appoggiatura C# should be sustained for one eighth-note, the ornamental notes B#-C#-B#-C# falling on the bass note E and the final B# on the lower-voice D#.

There are two relevant motifs. They are introduced in the first and second phrases of the prelude respectively. M1 is presented by the treble voice in mm. 1-2. It begins and ends on the fifth degree of the C# minor scale. Its first half measure features the ornamented broken chord G#-E#-C# in eighth-note motion. Hardly is the keynote reached than it is propelled—suddenly and enhanced by an arpeggio—up to the octave. In the motif's second half, a stepwise descent in dotted rhythm leads to a long final note. The character of this motif might be described as mild and graceful. As for the dynamic design, the sudden octave jump offers itself as the obvious climax toward which the tension in the first half measure rises and from which it then descends. Within the prelude's first phrase, M1 is imitated (mm. 2-3) and sequenced on the dominant (mm. 3-4). In the imitation of this sequence (mm. 4-5), the slight abbreviation at the end is due to the phrasing in the right hand. For the same reason, grace-note and mordent are not appropriate here.

The only other complete quotation of M1 occurs in mm. 8-9. There are, however, quite a few developments, deriving mainly from the first half bar. In mm. 9-10, the right-hand's threefold use of this partial motif brings about a rise in tension. The middle voice answers with a single quotation that leaves out the octave leap (m. 10-11), and the lower voice continues with its own little build-up in a twofold motion whose final steps point downward (m. 11-12). A similar development of M1 can be witnessed in mm. 24-28: the threefold rise in the right-hand line corresponds with that in mm. 9-10, and the lower voice also answers with a twofold quotation of the partial motif, which this time takes up the original octave leap. It is then extended through two additional sequences with upturned endings, resulting in a powerful increase toward the peak note F \sharp (m. 28m). All the while the right hand uses the half-measure figure for a gradual descent. A third development of this kind involves only the right hand: mm. 30-31 feature a fourfold rising motion that prepares a climax on the G \sharp at m. 32₁.

These developments aside, there are short quotations of thematic components that mainly serve to create overall unity. The partial motif frames the end of the third phrase by appearing in m. 12 (twice) and in m. 14, it wanders through the voices in the fourth phrase (see the almost continuous motion from L: m. 15 to M: m. 18), and concludes this section (M: m. 20). Two further quotations appear toward the end of the piece (L: m. 34 and M: m. 37). The rhythmic figure from the center of M1 also occurs independently (mm. 9-11, 15, 17, 21-27, 30-31, 35, 36, and 38). Even the cadential formulas in mm. 13-14 and 34-35 rely in their leading voices on this rhythmic figure.

M2 is exactly one measure long. First presented in mm. 5-6, where it begins after the downbeat and ends on the first eighth-note of the following measure, it consists of an ascending broken chord that brings with it a natural though soft increase in tension, and a falling scale that resolves this tension. This motif only appears twice in the prelude: in mm. 5-7 where the model is followed by two descending sequences, and in mm. 20-23 where the same progression—model plus two descending sequences—is extended through a fourth sequence whose end melts into the M1 development of mm. 23-28.

The prelude's overall dynamic level remains gentle. As the tension rises slightly through the first phrase and falls through the descending sequences of the second, there is an initial furtive climax in the middle of m. 5. The second overall climax occurs in the third phrase. While it is somewhat stronger than the first, it is weakened by the fact that the treble reaches it in the middle of 10, the bass only on the downbeat of m. 12.

The fourth phrase features three dynamic curves in its three subphrases. They gradually rise in intensity, yet none of them is important enough to serve as an overall climax. The more significant peak follows at the beginning of the long section where, corresponding with the two initial phrases of the piece, it falls on the first peak note of M2, at the end of m. 20.

The three most powerful climaxes in the prelude are thus:

- right hand, middle of m. 25,
- left hand, middle of m. 28,
- both hands together, downbeat of m. 32.

Thereafter, the tension recedes (no accent on A in m. 33!). The final passage, after the interrupted cadence in mm. 34-35, features an extremely soft, subdued build-up through mm. 35-36 to the downbeat of m. 37.

m. 1

m. 15

m. 30

WTC I/4 in C# minor – Fugue

The subject begins with a whole-note in m. 1 and ends four notes later with a return to the keynote. The quarter-note C# on the downbeat of m. 4 completes a full cadence, since the whole-note D# in the third measure, representing both the subdominant and the following dominant harmony (for more details see below), finds its resolution onto the tonic on this C#.

i vii⁷ i⁶ ii⁶ V⁷ i
 (i V⁷ i⁶ ii² V⁷ i)

With its length of a mere five notes, this compact little unit is one of the most condensed subjects in Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. The subject's five notes define a single, indivisible

phrase. The pitch range is extremely limited: the keynote is surrounded by only one note below and two notes above it. Three of the four intervals are seconds. The remaining interval, however, makes all the difference. This seemingly inconspicuous little curve features in m. 2 the rarest of "high-tension intervals," the diminished fourth between B# and E.

With regard to the rhythmic pattern, it is necessary to look beyond this subject at the other components of the thematic material. The subject's three different note values—whole-note, half-note, and quarter-note—are later complemented by much rhythmic variety including eighth-notes and frequent syncopations, particularly in the form of half-notes tied to a quarter-note on the following downbeat.

In determining what kind of dynamic design may be expressed in the brief five-note phrase with regard to its melodic make-up, rhythmic shape, and implied harmonic progression, one finds that the subject of this fugue allows for two rather different interpretations. The choice depends on how the individual performer values the facts mentioned above:

- Performers who perceive the specific power emanating from the diminished fourth in m. 2 will interpret this striking interval as the subject's center of tension. This concept requires a tempo slow enough to allow for the melodic step to be fully savored.
- Performers who, encouraged by the *alla breve* time signature, wish to focus on rhythm, may feel that the long D# in m. 3 carries the climax. Harmonically, this also makes sense as the beginning of this note represents the subdominant field within the cadence. This concept, in order to sound consistent, implies a generally faster tempo for the whole piece. There should also then be less emotional emphasis on the climax than in the first interpretation.

The choice between these two approaches is so much a matter of personal inclination that any academic reasoning would seem out of place. However, one little warning for performers: avoid trying to serve two masters at one time. An adherence to the second concept will necessarily have to under-emphasize the interesting interval in favor of the rhythmic pulse. Equally, an adherence to the first concept cannot, at the same time, stress the rhythmic element. In either case the subject should convey great calm together with a peculiarly intense, introverted excitement.

The subject appears twenty-nine times in this fugue. (As this is a five-part fugue and fruitless discussions about whether there are two altos, two tenors etc. should be avoided, v1, v2, v3, v4, v5 is here used to refer to “voice one,” “voice two” etc.)

1. m. 1-4	v5	11. m. 35-39	v4	21. m. 81-84	v4
2. m. 4-7	v4	12. m. 38-41	v3	22. m. 89-92	v1
3. m. 7-10	v3	13. m. 44-48	v2	23. m. 94-96	v1
4. m. 12-15	v2	14. m. 48-51	v1	24. m. 95-97	v2
5. m. 14-17	v1	15. m. 51-54	v4	25. m. 96-98	v1
6. m. 19-22	v4	16. m. 54-57	v2	26. m. 97-100	v5
7. m. 22-26	v4	17. m. 59-62	v1	27. m. 100-102	v4
8. m. 25-29	v3	18. m. 66-69	v1	28. m. 107-109	v1
9. m. 29-33	v5	19. m. 73-76	v5	29. m. 112-115	v2
10. m. 32-35	v3	20. m. 76-80	v1		



Modifications of the subject occur both rhythmically and melodically, both at the beginning and at the end of the subject: At the beginning, the interval adjustment characteristic for tonal answers occurs only once, in mm. 12-13. More frequent are rhythmic alterations: the first note may be shortened—often to a half-note (m. 7), once even to an eighth-note (the upbeat to m. 49). At the end, the resolving note appears in many guises. It may come early, thus falling on an unaccented beat and sounding harmonically “wrong” (mm. 14-15). It may also be delayed (as in m. 46) or reached indirectly (as in m. 41). It may fall on a beat so unlikely for a resolution that it is not felt as such (as in mm. 50-51), or it may appear integrated into another melodic unit (as in mm. 57 and 62). Finally, it may even be completely missing (as in mm. 94-98).

A small but emotionally influential modification occurs in the middle of the phrase. The diminished fourth—an interval essentially characteristic of the minor scale—may give way to a perfect fourth whenever the subject is stated in the major mode (as in mm. 29-35 and 54-57). Whenever this happens, the next interval, originally a semitone, is adjusted correspondingly to a whole-tone descent.³

³The note group D# C# F# E in v1 mm. 54-57, however, is not a subject entry. The combination of an initial major second with a perfect fourth is too unlikely, and assuming a stretto at this early stage in the fugue would mean ignoring Bach’s design, which seems so consciously to reserve the stretto intensification for later.

Summing up all these modifications we obtain an amazing result: the only feature in this subject to remain unaltered throughout the fugue is the rhythmic pattern of two half-notes in the subject's second measure. And while parallel statements of the subject are not used, there are a few strettos toward the end of the fugue (see entries 23 to 26 in mm. 94-99).

The C#-minor fugue is widely known to be a triple fugue. This term indicates that two of the prominent ideas beside the subject do not behave as mere companions but lead lives of their own. Yet this does not necessarily exclude the existence of a counter-subject. And indeed, at the point where one expects the first companion to enter, there appears a line that is characteristic, independent, and recurs later (see v5 mm. 4-8 D# to D#). The only detail of this counter-subject that is a bit confusing is its length: CS surpasses the length of the subject it is supposedly accompanying. (Yet, as the following will show, a different concept of phrase length is improbable.) CS is taken up, albeit without its first note, in voice 4 (see A in m. 7 to G# in m. 11). Thereafter, it never appears again in its full range. There are, however, several segments that qualify as separate building blocks in this fugue. These shall be investigated briefly.

One immediately obvious segment to recur separately derives from the end of CS. It consists of a syncopation (see mm. 6-7: F#), sometimes approached with an upbeat (a quarter-note or two eighth-notes), and followed by a stepwise descent ending in a smooth "hook." This CS segment will be called M1; its frequent appearances can be verified in the five-part sketch. Note that M1 occurs with greatest density in the first section (mm. 1-22₁), which is built in such a way that it generates a powerful dynamic increase, brought about both by the rising order of statements and by the increasing number of voices. Owing to its gesture of relaxation, the effect M1 exerts in this context is one of soothing or balancing. The first segment of CS also revolves around a syncopation, one that is followed by an inverted mordent figure (see mm. 4-5). This figure is then dropped and forgotten for a long time, but resurfaces in mm. 41-42 (v3) and in mm. 45-46 (v1) before eventually turning out to have been a forerunner of the third subject (see below). Because of this final relationship with the third subject, it is here called M3. A last element deserving attention is the rising tetrachord introduced in mm. 17-19 (see v5: G# to C#, B to E). It accompanies the subject particularly between mm. 23 and 35 where, quite in contrast to the effect of the above-mentioned M1, it reinforces the dynamically increasing tendency. From m. 35 onward it turns into the upbeat of the fugue's second subject (see below). Because of this later integration, it shall be referred to as M2.

After having identified the counter-subject as well as the smaller motifs that, in part, derive from it, the stage is set for the other subjects in this triple fugue. Their appearance is connected to, though not entirely corresponding with, the fugue's large-scale ternary design. Looking at the composition without knowing much about it, one would be able to distinguish three major parts: a first part featuring only occasional eighth-notes (mm. 1-35), a second part displaying a constant flow of eighth-notes (mm. 36-93), and a third part where the eighth-notes are again abandoned (mm. 94-115). The second subject (S2) emerges at the outset of the second part, in the voice that moves in eighth-notes. Just like the main subject, S2 appears with various modifications. Trying to pinpoint its main features one finds an upbeat (which, in its first statement, is the stepwise ascent of M2) followed by an ornamental line of sequencing one-measure figures hiding a whole-measure descent (see mm. 36-40: G#, F#, E, D#, C#). Both the exact length, i.e., the number of measures expounding the ornamental figure, and the exact metrical ending of the second subject remain open to constant changes. The tension curve in this second subject, however, is quite unmistakable: a short rise in the upbeat is followed by an extended release in the descent. In comparison to the first subject, the intensity is considerably reduced. The character of S2 may be described as "introverted and relaxed."

The beginning of the fugue's second large part also marks the resurrection of M3. As a pattern consisting of upbeat + syncopation + inverted mordent, it can be detected already in mm. 36-38 (v5: G# C# B# C#) and, even closer to the original, in mm. 39-41 (v4: B A# G# F# E# F# G#) and mm. 45-46 (v1: D# C# B# A# B#). When it finally discloses itself, the third subject (S3) takes up the more outgoing variants among the traits of M3, the leaping-fourth upbeat and the inverted mordent in eighth-note motion, and adds, as a particular characteristic, the repeated-note splitting of the syncopation. The third subject's character can be described as "extroverted and active." S3 plays a major role in this fugue, from its initiation in mm. 49-51 (v3) to the end of the composition. The dynamic outline in S3 consists in a rise toward the downbeat (i.e., to the last of the repeated notes), followed by a relaxation.

The image shows a musical score for three subjects (S1, S2, and S3) in C# minor. S1 is in the treble clef, S2 in the middle clef, and S3 in the bass clef. The score shows the first few measures of each subject, with S1 starting with a whole note and S2/S3 starting with eighth notes. A bracket labeled 'or' spans the first two measures of S1.

Episodes are generally defined as “subject-free passages.” In a fugue with three subjects, only those measures that do not feature any of the subjects would therefore truly qualify. These are very few. In the first part of the ternary design, before the entries of S2 and S3, there are only two short stretches; these are matched later in the fugue by two more:

E1	mm. 10 ₂ -12 ₂	E3	m. 88
E2	mm. 17 ₂ -19 ₂	E4	mm. 109 ₂ -112 ₁

The most prominent feature in E1 is M1; the soothing quality of this motif defines this first episode as a softening break that allows breathing space before the plunge into the next span of tension build-up. E2 is determined by M2. The role of this episode in the overall development of tension is therefore that of a link continuing the tension increase. In E3, the little M1 figure that seemed long forgotten is briefly recalled, thus giving this episode again a calming quality.

Finally, E4 is conceived as a cadential close. Sounding as it does at the end of a longer dominant pedal that had already provided the backdrop for a tension increase, this cadence promises relief that it then withholds: its final chord is an oddity and deserves more detailed discussion. Following the dominant-seventh chord in m. 111 there are theoretically three different resolutions listeners might expect: the tonic (C# minor), the Picardy-third modification of the tonic (C# major), or the interrupted cadence with a chord on step vi (A major). What Bach gives us is not one of these three but a combination—and the oddest possible combination, for that matter. The left hand in m. 112 plays the third A-C#, representing the chord on vi, while the right hand simultaneously intones the E#-G#-C# of the Picardy-third tonic. This results not only in a polytonal effect but also in an implied clash between the implied fifth E of the A major chord and the sounding E# of the C# major harmony. What Bach expresses by using this artful though daring device seems to be this: the cadentially confirmed ending in the home key at this moment still leaves so much unresolved tension that it demands yet another pair of S1/S3 statements. Yet these should not sound as a coda. Perhaps Bach created the incomplete harmonic resolution that binds the final cadence as a necessary completion to the one in mm. 111-112 in order to achieve this effect of “belonging.”

The complexity of the rhythmic pattern and the structural design in conjunction with the predominance of stepwise motion in all but the S3 upbeat all favor the interpretation of this fugue as one of rather calm character. Upon closer inspection of the emotional implications of this character it becomes obvious that there is a distinct hierarchy within the components of the thematic material: The main subject is defined by a

strong introverted urge, the second subject is generally lighter in its mood, while the third subject shows a jolly, extroverted vivacity.

The three subjects appear in all possible combinations. Determining what kind of mood or spirit results from each of these juxtapositions lays a good foundation for an understanding of the entire composition.

- The coupling of S1 + S2 brings about a quality that is more serene, less urgent than that which determines the main subject when heard alone (S1 “introverted/intense” + S2 “introverted/relaxed”).
- In the S2 + S3 combination, all the darker drive has gone. What is left is a momentarily intense quality, soon giving way to one of relaxation (S2 “introverted/relaxed” + S3 “extroverted/active”).
- Conversely, when S1 is paired with S3, two strong forces join, expanding both inwardly and outwardly (S1 “introverted/intense” + S3 “extroverted/active”).

The range of tempo in this composition is confined on the one hand by the basic character, which is rather calm, on the other hand by the time signature, which requires an *alla breve* pulse. Ideal is an eighth-note motion that is unhurried but can nonetheless be clearly felt in half-measure groups. The corresponding articulation requires legato for almost all melodic notes. An exception can be made within the third subject where the first interval, the ascending fourth, and the ensuing note repetitions may sound in a bouncing non legato in order to give credit to the special “outgoing” mood of this component of the material. The *Urtext* of this fugue does not indicate any ornaments.

The relative tempo of the prelude to the fugue that does justice to their characters sets larger metric units in proportion. Owing to the strong half-measure feeling in both pieces, a good effect is achieved like this:

half a bar	corresponds with	one bar
in the prelude		in the fugue

(Approximate metronome settings: prelude beat = 100, fugue beat = 66.)

The fugue’s design is complex. Within the first large part, the full ensemble of five voices is attained only transitorily in mm. 19-20; the fifth entry and most of the redundant subject statement sound in still reduced ensemble. After the ensuing cadence in mm. 21-22 the number of voices drops to only three, a fact suggesting the beginning of a new “round.” This second section ends in m. 35 in full ensemble and with a pronounced cadence, followed again by a reduction of the ensemble to three voices.

The third section introduces the second subject, which sounds both against the main subject and independently, both in its original shape and in inversion (see mm. 41-44). In m. 49, the third subject enters for the first

time. Its immediate combination with both S1 and S2 marks the beginning of “something new”: the fourth section. From here to the end of the large middle part, there are two structurally analogous progressions:

mm. 48-72	correspond with	mm. 73-93
5 three-subject juxtapositions	:	4 three-subject juxtapositions
grouped 3 + 1 + 1	:	grouped 2 + 1 + 1
(mm. 48-57 / 59-62 / 66-69	:	mm. 73-79 / 81-84 / 89-92)
interspersed with two passages featuring only S2/S3		
(mm. 57-58, mm. 62-64 : mm. 79-80, mm. 84-88)		
rounded off by passages with distinct cadential-bass steps		
(mm. 69-71	:	mm. 92-94)

After the end of these two sections, the fugue’s fourth and fifth, the second subject is dropped. Instead of three-subject juxtapositions, the sixth section begins with S1 and S3 in simultaneous stretto. All this together provides a picture of six sections, with the following statements of the main subject:

S1:	I	mm. 1-22	v5, v4, v3, v2, v1, v4;
	II	mm. 22-35	v4, v3, v5, v3;
	III	mm. 35-48	v4, v3, v2;
	IV	mm. 48-72	v1, v4, v2, v1-v1;
	V	mm. 73-93	v5, v1, v4, v1;
	VI	mm. 94-115	v1v2, v1v5, v4, v1, v2.

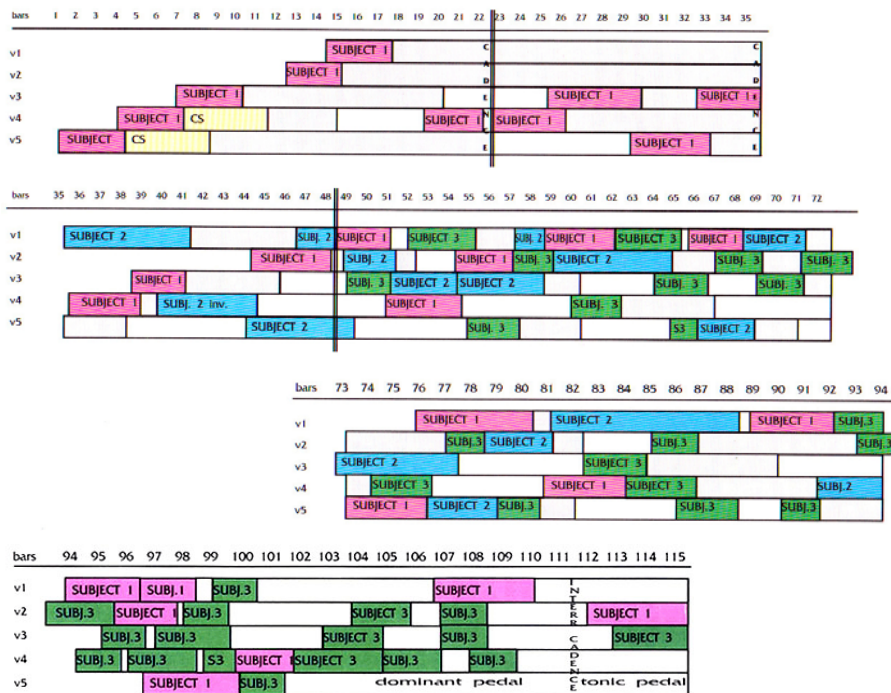
As both the second and the third subject enter considerably later, it is to be expected that their own “rounds” do not entirely coincide with those of the main subject. For the fifteen statements of the second subject, four groups can be made out:

S2:	I	mm. 35-48	v1, v4, v5, v1;
	II	mm. 49-65	v2, v3, v1, v2;
	III	mm. 66-71	v5, v1;
	IV	mm. 72-94	v3, v5, v2, v1, v4.

The third subject enters last but seems the strongest among its rivals. It surpasses both the other subjects in the number of its statements. It catches up with the second subject by already finishing its fourth round in m. 92; and it equals the main subject insofar as it also builds a total of six rounds.

The 37 entries of the third subject are as follows:

S3:	I	mm. 49-64	v3, v1, v5, v2, v4, v1;
	II	mm. 64-73	v3v5, v2, v3, v2;
	III	mm. 74-84	v4, v2, v5, v3;
	IV	mm. 84-92	v4v2, v5, v5;
	V	mm. 92-101	v1v2, v4v3-v4v3, v2v4, v1, v5;
	VI	mm. 102-115	v4v3, v2v4, v3+v2v4, v3.



The harmonic outline will here be described with reference to the main subject. Its first six statements, all on the tonic or dominant of C# minor, are concluded with a cadential close in G# minor in m. 21-22. The next four entries effect a modulation to the relative major key, through F# minor, C# minor, and B major to E major, with a cadential close in m. 34-35. The third section finds S1 returned to the C# minor field. It closes, interlocked with the beginning of the next round, in C# major at m. 49₁. The fourth section begins firmly anchored in the subdominant, with two entries in F# minor and one in the relative key of A major. However, the last two S1 statements revert to C# minor, with the repeated entry in the first voice ending in a floating position on the dominant-seventh chord. The fifth section confirms the return to the tonic by placing all its four S1 statements on C# itself and concluding this part with a cadential close in C# minor (mm. 93-94). The final section basically remains on the tonic. Stretto entries occur on various pitch levels but all relating to an implied key of C# minor. From m. 105 onward the G# pedal, giving way only momentarily to its leading-note F*, prepares the end of the composition, which is reached with a final subject statement over a tonic pedal.

Within the first section, a gradual rise in tension is brought about by the increasing number of voices, enhanced by their rising entering order. As has been mentioned above, there are forces that serve to hold the tension back and prevent a premature full-fledged climax: the relaxing tendency of M1 and the fact that this section, belying the obvious expectation for a fugal exposition, does not close in full ensemble.

The second section brings the modulation to the major mode and with it a six-bar-long stretch in five voices. In addition, the calming influence of M1 is replaced by the forward-pushing gesture of M2. Thus the second tension increase is considerably stronger than the first. It creates the impression that it means to unite the first two sections under one common "target." After this, the third section maintains a low tension profile as there is neither an increase in the number of voices nor any harmonic or structural device that might engender a rise.

The two analogous sections that follow describe analogous dynamic curves. The climaxes fall at the respective beginnings, where three-subject juxtapositions create a state of very high intensity that abates only very gradually, through the interspersed S2/S3 paired statements, the following entry group, and the final cadential-bass steps. Toward the end of the fourth section, this tension decay is melodically supported by spans of chromatic descent. An equivalent in the fifth section can be observed in the unexpected re-emergence of the soothing M1.

At the beginning of the sixth section, the previously achieved intensity of three simultaneous subject statements is surpassed by the combination of the two stronger ones that, for several bars, now both sound in stretto. (Whether such unheard-of density can actually be grasped by the human ear and mind—most probably it cannot—is beside the point, last but not least because Bach's music was certainly to a large extent written "For the Greater Glory of God." But the effect of this immense density is undoubtedly stunning.)

The middle of this section then brings forth a sudden strong decline in tension, enhanced by the chromatic descent in the uppermost voice (see mm. 101-105). As this descent touches ground, it is met by the entry of the dominant pedal. This gives new impetus to the tension, which rises again much faster than it had previously fallen. A parallel statement of S3 tries to surpass the earlier strettos in intensity and is supported by the harmonic sidestep to the diminished seventh chord. Even the following cadence does not yet bring about the deserved relief but instead a climax of yet different means: the momentarily bitonal cadential close mentioned above.