

WTC I/11 in F major – Prelude

This prelude, written in almost consistent two-part texture, is determined by a figure of consecutive broken chords with occasional auxiliary and passing notes. With 16th-notes in the compound time of 12/8, this figure dominates the entire composition without a single interruption.

The first cadence appears at the end of the figure's first statement, shortly before the end of m. 2. It thus defines the thematic component and not a structural section. The next harmonic progression effects a modulation to the relative minor key, which is reached in the middle of m. 6. Contrary to the first cadential close, this one indicates the completion of a structural process.

There are altogether three sections:

1. mm. 1-6₇ F major to D minor
2. mm. 6-12₇ D minor to G minor
3. mm.12-18 G minor back to F major

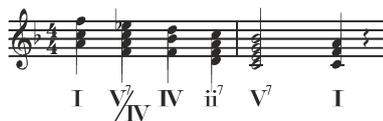
The prelude comprises a striking symmetry in its first two sections:

- mm.1-2₇ ≈ 6₇-8₁ (transposed, voices inverted)
- mm.3-6₇ ≈ 9-12₇ (transposed only)

As the entire prelude consists of broken-chord patterns—both in its 16th-note figures and in their eighth-note accompaniment—and does not feature any truly melodic passages, a swift tempo is indicated. An ideal rendition is one that allows listeners to feel the four-beats-to-a-measure meter implicit behind the written compound-time designation. The articulation requires a light non legato for the eighth- and quarter-notes and a leggiero-style touch for the 16th-notes.

The most noticeable ornaments in this prelude are the compound trills on the half-notes in mm. 3, 4, 9, 10, 12, and 13. The long trill in mm. 14-15 may be included here as it fulfills basically the same function. The execution is as follows: the speed of all these ornaments is in 32nd-notes. Each of them ends with a suffix (the ones in U: mm. 4 and 9 including the raised lower neighbor notes B_♯ and F_♯ respectively). The onset is as visually indicated: concave curves signify a beginning with the four-note group of upper neighbor/main note/lower neighbor/main note followed by the usual trill motion, whereas convex curves indicate a launch with the inverted shape of lower neighbor/main note/upper neighbor/main note followed by

the complementing number of two-note shakes.¹ The ornament in the final measure is a point d'arrêt trill, consisting only of four notes followed by a stop before the final sweep. The same applies to the ornament in U: m. 17, which should stop well before the end of the dotted quarter-note because the resolution is delayed by a tie-prolongation. The example below gives the execution for one representative of each ornament-type.



There is only one relevant figure, the broken-chord in 16th-notes introduced in the upper voice in mm. 1-2. It can easily be reduced to the harmonic progression shown. This figure describes a sequence in which a harmony when inverted is expanded with its seventh, then resolves, only to find the resolution itself turning into another seventh chord and resolving again.

The dynamic development equivalent to this harmonic process is twofold: the slight waves of tension-increase and relaxation appear under the umbrella of an overall diminuendo, either from the beginning of the entire figure to the return to the tonic (as in mm. 1-2) or, in the shorter versions later on, only through a single chord/seventh-chord/resolution group. In its development, the figure is shortened and complemented by a trill. As such, it occurs in stretto imitation (see mm. 3-4). As the harmonic progression departs from the tonic, the expected resolution is repeatedly substituted by an entirely foreign note (see the C-major seventh chord followed by C# in m. 5 etc.) without changing the basic pattern.

The dynamic outline of the first section presents an S-curve. After a fairly assertive beginning and the two-measure decrease mentioned above,

¹In other words, the ornaments begin with the following notes:

m. 3: U on A and L on D m. 4: U on D and L on E, m. 9: U on A and L on B
m. 10: U on E and L on A m. 12: U on A m. 13: M on F m. 14: L on C.

It is interesting to observe that Bach's basic idea seems to be that of a trill "from below"; but wherever such beginning from the lower neighbor note would clash with a pitch just heard before, he substitutes this beginning for the opposite one; see e.g., in U: m. 4, a beginning on the lower neighboring note B would clash with the B_♭ in the preceding figure; in U: m. 9, a beginning on F# would sound wrong after the recent F#.

the modulation to D minor features an increase, with each figure in the stretto beginning slightly louder than the preceding one. This leads to a climax (which should, however, be gentle enough not to rival the section opening) followed by a gradual decrease up to the end of the section.

The second section begins similarly with a two-measure decrease. The passage featuring the development of the figure is preceded by an extra measure (m. 8) that initiates the increase of tension, although it does not contribute to the subsequent modulation. From the middle of m. 10 onward, a gradual relaxation leads to the end of the second section.

The third section sets out with two stretches of 1½-measure extension each. Both feature continuous ornamental motion in one hand and a new development of the figure in the other, and in both cases the harmonic progression moves in active steps (i.e., in a pattern of ascending fourths; see mm. 12₇-13: g⁷-C-F-B), mm. 14-15₇: d⁷-g⁷-C⁷-F). These developments engender a dynamic rise much stronger than any of the previous ones, with the prelude's climax falling on the middle beat of m. 15. In the final descent, the "false imitation" beginning in L: m. 16₇ may be given extra emphasis, but neither the trills nor the eighth-notes in mm. 17-18 should interrupt the gradual relaxation that continues through to the last measure. The prelude ends in a gentle hue.

WTC I/11 in F major – Fugue

The subject of the F-major fugue is slightly less than four measures long. It begins with an eighth-note upbeat and ends at m. 4₁ where, after the dominant harmony of m. 3, the A represents the resolution onto the tonic. The subject includes two features that indicate subphrasing, both occurring in m. 2 after the downbeat: a change in the rhythmic pattern (the continuous eighth-notes give way to 16th-note runs with eighth-notes only at their ends), and a considerable shift in the pitch level (a major sixth below the earlier slow turn around the C). Thus the 16th-note run sounds almost like a new beginning.

The rhythmic pattern is simple, consisting only of eighth-notes and 16th-notes. The interval structure contains no surprises either; apart from the above-mentioned leap, all the subject's intervals are seconds. However, there is a hidden superimposed line, created by the downbeats of the four measures in the subject: D-C-B₇-A. Harmonically, the steps of this line represent the steps of a simple cadence.

The dynamic outline of the subject is determined by three criteria: the shape of the two subphrases, their intensity relation, and the influence of the superimposed four-note descent. Within the first subphrase, the D in m. 1 is metrically supported by falling on a strong beat and harmonically by representing the subdominant, and as no rivaling melodic or rhythmic features claim attention, this D is the obvious choice for a climax. Within the second subphrase, the eighth-note B \flat represents the dominant-seventh chord. It is also the only longer note value and, because of the ascending scale leading to it, the note with the greatest melodic emphasis. The combination of the two subphrases results in two structurally very similar curves.



The first is more exposed both harmonically (the step to the subdominant being more active than that to the V⁷) and rhythmically (the eighth-notes sounding more forceful than the ornamental or scalar 16th-notes). Considering the line created by the four downbeats, the concept will be modified slightly to accommodate the continuity

behind the two-subphrase structure. This means that the C in m. 2 is no longer the almost complete relaxation it would be if seen only as the end of the first subphrase, but appears integrated into the superimposed diminuendo D-C-B \flat -A.



There are fourteen subject statements:

1. mm. 0-4	M	6. mm. 25-29	L	11. mm. 46-50	L
2. mm. 4-8	U	7. mm. 27-31	M	12. mm. 48-52	M
3. mm. 9-13	L	8. mm. 36-40	U	13. mm. 50-54	U
4. mm. 17-21	U	9. mm. 38-42	M	14. mm. 64-68	U
5. mm. 21-25	M	10. mm. 40-44	L		



Besides the adjustment of the initial interval in the answer, which occurs only once (U: mm. 4-5), the subject undergoes two other variations. Both are introduced toward the end of the work. Three statements feature a fill-up 16th-note immediately after the second climax (mm. 49-53: L, M, U). As a result, the second subphrase consists exclusively of 16th-notes, reinforcing the contrast with the all-eighth-note first subphrase. The final statement, substituting the four eighth-notes in the upbeat and the first measure with an ornamental line, comprises even more 16th-notes.

M: mm. 56-57 is imitated through all voices in mm. 57-61 and 63-64. By contrast, E4 consists of nothing but a cadential close, as does the first segment of E5, which repeats this cadence in varied transposition. The final episode, too, is only a slightly more elaborate cadential formula. This structural equivalence of the cadential closes aside, the episodes in this fugue show neither analogies nor other relevant patterns.

The role each episode plays in the development of this composition can be easily deduced from what has been observed so far:

- E1, anticipating the ensuing counter-subject appearance, links two statements, as does E2, quoting the entire counter-subject against rising sequences.
- E3 with its descending sequences brings a slight release in tension. E4, acting as a cadential close, represents a definite relaxation.
- E5a creates the same effect of relaxation, whereas E5b, determined by its ascending eighth-note scales, creates the impression of an increase in tension.
- E6 sets out with the same ascending eighth-notes but then relaxes in the final cadence.

The simple rhythmic pattern in conjunction with the scalar or ornamental structure of the 16th-notes indicates a rather lively basic character. The tempo should be fast enough to reflect the bouncing mood of the eighth-notes and the ornamental nature of the 16th-notes. The appropriate articulation is quasi legato for the 16th-notes and non legato for all eighth-notes except for those in appoggiaturas and closing formulas.²

The relative tempo of the prelude to the fugue poses a problem because of the inherent triple meter in both movements. The simple proportion, in which an eighth-note in the prelude corresponds with an eighth-note in the fugue, is possible. It strings the two pieces so firmly together as to almost blur the confines of each. Moreover, there is the danger of monotony in two consecutive pieces both based on mainly two note values in exactly the same speed (dotted quarter-notes = 63). I propose another proportion, which may seem more complicated but has the advantage of giving a livelier, more interesting result. In it, an artificial group of three 16th-notes in the prelude corresponds with an eighth-note in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: dotted quarter-notes in the prelude = 72, eighth-notes in the fugue = 144.) The different speed helps to differentiate touch and color in the fugue's heavier eighth-notes from the prelude's lighter ones.

²In mm. 45, 55, and 71, the ornamented notes in the upper voice are not detached from the notes that follow. Likewise in the middle voice, the do-si-do figure in mm. 55-56 is legato.

The fugue features mainly two kinds of ornaments: a long trill on the penultimate note of the counter-subject and mordents in the typical closing formulas. The trill in the counter-subject abides by the same rules that would apply to a similar trill in the subject: it is approached stepwise and thus begins on the main note, its speed is in 32nd-notes as these are twice as fast as the shorter written-out note values, and it ends in a suffix before resolving stepwise. The ornaments in the closing formulas (mm. 45, 55, and 71) are short since their resolutions are in each case anticipated and fall before the next strong beat, thus demanding a point d'arrêt. They all begin on the upper neighbor note and move in 32nd-notes or slightly faster. In the two cases with dotted-note rhythmic figures, the ornament stops short before the third eighth-note beat. The ornament in m. 28 is a variation of the long trill mentioned above since the upper voice in mm. 26-29 features a variation of CS. Although shorter here, its beginning, speed, and end should match the long trill. Finally, the mordent at m. 48₁ begins on the upper neighbor note and fills the note value with four swift sixty-fourth-notes.³

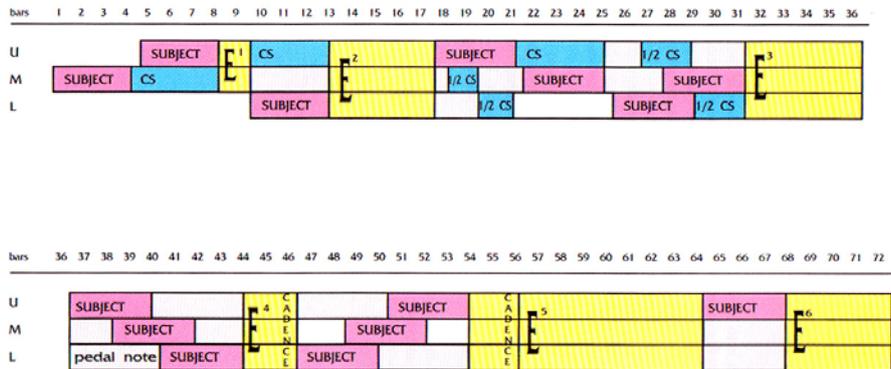
Several features in this fugue provide indications for its design. The subject statements beginning in mm. 21 and 46 both sound in reduced ensemble and should be earmarked for possible section beginnings. In a third instance, the stretto launched in m. 36 is accompanied by a sustained pedal and thus also creates the effect of not actively involving all three voices. The episodes between the second and third statements (E1) and between the third and fourth ones (E2) are both related to the primary material insofar as they quote the counter-subject. They thus suggest a link between entries belonging to a single structural section. Furthermore, both episodes have an ascending pitch outline. E3, by contrast, serves as a kind of extension to the preceding subject statement and shows a descending pitch line. The triple stretto + closing formula in mm. 36-46 is structurally analogous to the triple stretto + closing formula in mm. 46-56. The final cadential close is built along the same pattern as the two preceding ones (compare particularly mm. 71-72 with mm. 45-46).

Harmonically, the fugue remains rooted in F major until m. 31. The subsequent measures undertake a shift to D minor (see m. 32, reinforced by its dominant, the A-major chord in mm. 34 and 36), which becomes the basis of the triple stretto from m. 36 onward. A cadence in this relative-minor key closes this segment in m. 46. The following measures pick up

³As this ornament seems somewhat out of keeping with the remainder of the piece, it may be worth considering whether one might ignore the indication.

the triple stretto in inverse order of entering voices and in G minor, the relative minor to the subdominant. This key is confirmed with an explicit cadence in m. 56. Two measures after this cadence the fugue is back in the home key of F major, in which the final, varied subject statement appears. This is again rounded off with a cadential formula similar to the two previous ones.

The design that becomes apparent from these observations is unusual insofar as it reveals a fugue consisting of “parts” rather than “sections.” The first part, encompassing two sections, is united by the home key; its two sections are glued together by the bridging power of E2 (which does not allow for phrasing before the fourth statement, although the entering order would suggest this) and by the density of material immediately afterward (which does not allow for phrasing after the fourth statement either, although the reduced texture would suggest this). This “part” is rounded off by E3, the relaxing episode in descending sequences that introduces the modulation. Although the second “part” does not literally encompass several sections, the explicit closing formulas in E4 and E5a give the impression of three segments.



The first half of the fugue, welded together of two sections, describes a gradual increase of tension. In the second half, each of the three segments begins with a climax in mighty intensification followed by an episode concluding in complete relaxation.