WTC I/15 in G major – Prelude

In the G-major prelude, the overall picture is dominated by 16th-notes. They appear in triplet groups, with eight such groups to each 4/4 measure. (Bach's twofold time signature in the first measure makes things look more complicated and treacherous than they really are since it is obviously not the treble part alone that features the triplets.)

These 16th-note triplets appear in three different grades of melodic quality, providing indicators for the basic interpretation of the prelude. A large portion displays broken chord patterns (see mm. 1-3 and 6-8 as well as the bass part from m. 11 onward), suggesting a harmonically determined composition. In other instances, they present a hidden two-part structure (see mm. 4-5 and 9-10) from which melodically rather neutral peak note lines emerge. In yet other measures, the 16th-notes appear in one-track lines that are at least partially melodic (see the treble part from m. 11 onward). These measures allow small motifs to surface. The prelude thus cannot be described with a single term. It sets out as a harmonically determined piece from which tentative melodic features soon arise, developing more and more into independent entities.

The first harmonic progression concludes in the second half of m. 2. As the pattern continues uninterrupted, this cadence should not be regarded as indicating the end of the first section. This is reached with the subsequent abrupt modulation to the dominant, which brings with it a noticeable change of pattern from m. 4 onward. (The caesura occurs only in U: m. 3. The lower part crosses a section boundary at the end of the measure without phrasing). In the second section, a first miniature cadence resolving in m. 5 does not interrupt the progression of the material, but the subsequent harmonic close confirms the dominant key on the downbeat of m. 11. The prelude comprises four structural sections altogether:

I mm. 1-3 tonic confirmed, modulation to the dominant

- II mm. $4-11_1$ dominant
- III mm. $11-13_1$ dominant
- IV mm. 13_2 -19 return to the tonic

No larger segment of the music recurs. Although the eye is caught by the obvious similarity between m. 5 and its transposition in m. 9, the position of both measures in the structural context is entirely different: m. 5 is

the second in a pair of measures in hidden two-part structure and represents a harmonic resolution, while m. 9 is the harmonically active first in a pair.

The basic character is easy to determine as rather lively: This is unambiguously suggested both by the simple rhythmic pattern with only two note values and by the frequent broken chords (in the triplets) and leaps (in the eighth-notes). Like the fugue it precedes, the prelude is downright virtuoso and should be played accordingly, in a very brisk pace. It does not feature any ornaments. With regard to articulation one should differentiate between the coarse level of simple contrast-non legato for the eighth-notes and legato for the 16th-notes-and the level of subtler shades. These include: non legato in a light, neutral touch for the accompanying eighth-note leaps, a more expressive non legato for eighth-notes in hidden two-part structure (where they move predominantly stepwise), quasi legato with a crisp touch for the 16th-notes in the broken chords, legato in a moderately expressive touch for the 16th-notes in hidden two-part structure, legato with some melodic expression in the 16th-notes forming motivic figures, and legato with melodic intensity for the eighth-notes in U: mm. 11-13 representing appoggiatura-resolution pairs.

The G-major prelude can be regarded as consisting of two halves. Each embodies a shorter introduction followed by a longer portion that develops and complements the material established before. The first half spans mm. 1-11₁. It is based on a harmonic idea presented in the right hand with virtuoso broken-chord patterns, accompanied by a rhythmicized pedal note with octave displacement. In the first simple cadence (mm. 1-2), the descending pitch direction of the broken-chord pattern is so dominant that it overruns all considerations for shaping along harmonic lines. In character with this virtuoso figure, the prelude thus begins with a rather energetic tone color followed by a diminuendo through two measures. The third measure is composed as a harmonic sequence; it takes up the V⁷-I pair from m. 2 and relocates it to D major. The equivalent to this feature in performance is a sequence also in the dynamic process, i.e., a repetition of the second half of the previous diminuendo. The question whether the dynamic level in m. 3 is generally higher or lower than that in m. 2 can be solved with the help of three observations: the pitch level is slightly lower in the second half of m. 3 than in the second half of m. 2, the second half of m. 3 features rests in the right hand part, the thinner texture adding to the effect of decreasing intensity, and m. 3 was recognized as the end of the first short section. A definite relaxation serves to underscore this fact in performance.

A new pattern arises from the last eighth-note beat of m. 3 onward. Retaining the virtuoso quality of the beginning, mm. 4-5 change the texture into that of a hidden two-part structure. In U: m. 4, a line with stepwise motion in eighth-note rhythm builds the melodic foreground, while the background consists of a pedal on D (the tonic of the newly established key) ornamented regularly by its leading note C[#]. In m. 5, the foreground line continues while the background figure is transferred to the left hand. (There should ideally be no audible difference between the two measures.) The melodic part is further paralleled in the left hand. The subsequent measures return to the texture and material of the first measures but vary it. Harmonically, mm. 6-7 and 8-9 recall the earlier sequences with their V⁷-I. The chords appear extended to whole-measure durations and feature varied accompaniment figures. It is important for the performance of this section to understand that the harmonic functions in the leading measures of these pairs represent a sudden and powerful increase in tension: the chord in m. 6 is vii⁷ of A (the dominant in D major), the one in m. 8 follows as vii⁷ of E (the relative minor to the subdominant). The next measures, mm. 9-10, return to the hidden two-part structure. The pedal-note change between the two measures reveals the cadential steps: E-A or steps ii-V of D major. The melodic parts of both voices set out in parallels and only separate in the second half of m. 10.

The dynamic equivalent to the processes described above for the first half of the prelude could be rendered somewhat like this: mm. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

mm.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	f^+-mf^+	mp^+-p^+	mp^-p	mp	mp^+	pf	mf	f^{-}	mp	mp^+	тp

The second half of the piece, covering the remaining nine measures, is based on motivic treble figures that introduce a new expressive quality. Beginning with the first little motif (see m. 11_{2-3} , with three sequences up to the E-D on m. 13_1), the melodically conceived 16th-notes followed by the appoggiatura-resolution pair in the eighth-notes add charm and grace to the prelude. (Note the dynamic shaping with U: crescendo to the appoggiatura, L: diminuendo from each strong beat onward. Dynamic imitations would be ill-advised here.) The second motif (mm. 13_2-14_2) presents a development of the first. It is twice as long, more elaborate in its triplet figures, and the appoggiatura is now indirect (D-E embedded in D-E-F-E). This motif also spawns sequences (mm. 14_2-15_2 and 15_2-16_2 .) The accompaniment, which had contained old material in the first motif, combining the broken-chord figure and the octave leap from mm. 1-4, is now much more intricate as it sets out with the varied broken-chord figure from m. 6 and continues it freely, albeit in virtuoso fashion.

The section ends with a figure of only one quarter-note length (see U: m. 16_3), complemented in the left hand by a unit that, because of its rhythm, has to be regarded as overlapping (m. 16_{3-4} C-A-F-D etc.). Both figures are sequenced many times, the treble right through to the end, whereas the bass figure gives way to a cadential-bass pattern in m. 18.

The development of tension in this second half is determined entirely by the direction of the sequences. Thus the first motif, which begins in something like *mf*, is followed in its descending sequences by a diminuendo. The second motif, which sets out with more vigor anyway, undergoes a further crescendo in its ascending development. As if to compensate this outburst, the third little figure, launched from a climax of less melodic intensity than its predecessors, describes a continuous relaxation up to the end of the prelude.

WTC I/15 in G major – Fugue

The subject of this fugue appears confusing with regard to its length. Asked where it ends one might find three possible answers, yet for one reason or another, each of them is not entirely convincing. Performers who regard the return to the keynote G (and with it, possibly, to the tonic harmony) on the last 16th-note of m. 4 as the end of the subject must admit that this conclusion is metrically not satisfactory. For performers who decide to include the downbeat of m. 5, the subject ends with an imperfect cadence, a solution that is harmonically uncommon. Performers who interpret the subject as concluding on the downbeat of m. 4 will find it both harmonically incomplete as it lacks the essential subdominant step that, substituted here by its relative minor, materializes only in m. 4, and melodically unconvincing as it ends on the fifth scale degree. Only in the inversion does this choice of a subject ending sound very persuasive. Bach must have felt the same, since he states the inversion repeatedly in this shortened scope (see below).

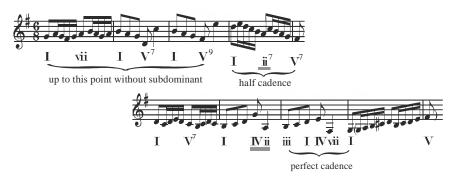
With this complex answer and no simple solution at hand, it will prove necessary to give each subphrase a name tag and then state very clearly which of them appear in the statements of this fugue. With regard to the first and second of the three concepts mentioned above, three subphrases must be distinguished. The first subphrase [a] consists of the ascending turn figures in m. 1, the subsequent eighth-note descent and the syncopated seventh leap in m. 2. The second subphrase [b], confined to m. 3, features

a varied partial sequence of the first subphrase: the eighth-note descent and the syncopated seventh leap recur, but they are linked by a smaller interval than before. The third subphrase [c] then consists of the downbeat eighth-note in m. 4 and the twofold scalar descent (with or without the note in m. 5_1). If one follows the third of the above-mentioned concepts and assumes the closure of the subject already on the downbeat of m. 4, there would only be two subphrases, [a] and [b], with [b] complemented by a resolution.

The pitch pattern consists primarily of stepwise motion, with only three leaps: two in m. 2, one in m. 3. Two of the leaps appear as consecutive intervals (m. 2: G-D-C). Among the seconds, the longer note values, i.e., the eighth-notes in mm. 2-3, have melodic value while the shorter are either ornamental, as is the case in the two turn figures at the beginning, or constitute scalar passages, as happens in the two five-note groups at the end of the subject.

In terms of its rhythm, the subject features three values: 16th-notes, eighth-notes and (syncopated) quarter-notes. The same three note values also constitute the predominant rhythmic pattern throughout the entire composition. A particular attribute of the rhythmic pattern in this subject is that it displays perfect symmetry in mm. 1-4. Were one to give a name tag to the rhythmic patterns of each measure, the result would read "x-y-y-x."

When analyzing the subject's harmonic background it seems worth anticipating an important trait of this fugue, i.e., that the subject frequently appears in inversion. The harmonic outline of this inversion is considerably different from that underlying the original shape. The following examples demonstrate this with harmonizations taken from mm. 11-15 and 20-24.



In our search for the intended climax we may thus not be able to rely on harmonic features. However, both the rhythmic pattern and the pitch outline provide congruous guidelines. Concerning the rhythm, the two

syncopations obviously capture special tension. As both of them coincide with high-tension leaps, there can be no doubt that the quarter-note C in m. 2 represents the climax of the first and the quarter-note E in m. 3 that of the second subphrase. Between the two, the second is stronger than the first because it is composed in an ascending sequence. After these two energetic climaxes, the third subphrase appears as little more than an afterthought. This may be one of the reasons why the doubt whether or not it "belongs" survives. The dynamic tendency follows the descending motion; thus the D at the outset of this subphrase is the beginning of a decrescendo.

The fugue comprises sixteen subject statements:

1. mm. $1-5_1$	U	9. mm. 51-54 ₁	U^*
2. mm. $5-9_1$	Μ	10. mm. 52-54 ₁	L*-
3. mm. 11-15 ₁	L	11. mm. 60_4 -63	M*
4. mm. 20-24 ₁	M inv	12. mm. 61_4 - 64_1	U*
5. mm. $24-28_1$	U _{inv}	13. mm. 69_4 -73 ₁	L _{inv}
6. mm. 28-31 ₁	L _{inv}	14. mm. $77-80_1$	M inv-orig
7. mm. 38-42 ₁	U	(15. mm. 78-79	L _{inv} **)
8. mm. 43-47 ₁	M inv	16. mm. 79-82	U -

Several of the statements are incomplete in one way or another. Only one is a genuine "false start" (indicated by parentheses in the table above). Entries that are shortened at the end are marked with a minus, those that are shortened in the middle carry an asterisk. Interestingly, the subject abridgements in this fugue have persuasive reasons. The loss of the third subphrase arises from the fact that it is perceived as an afterthought and that it leads to a harmonically imperfect ending—which, particularly after the perfect cadence in the inversion, makes it harmonically superfluous. And the compression of the first and second subphrases into one occurs only in stretto positions, clearly intended to avoid the octave parallels that would otherwise result.

There are not many other modifications. In two instances including the "false start," the beginning is delayed by a 16th-note and the subject thus appears in a slightly altered rhythm (mm. 51 and 78). On another occasion, a statement sets out as an inversion but later seems to be "convinced" (or dragged along) by the entering stretto partner to change its ending into that belonging to the original shape (mm. 77-80). Finally, one inverted subject finds its closing note displaced an octave lower (mm. 72-73), and another features an ornamental variation of the third subphrase (m. 46).

There are three stretto passages in this fugue, occurring respectively in mm. 51-54, 60-63, and 77-82. Parallels of whole statements do not occur. However, a short but very effective three-fold parallel (two voices moving in double thirds, another in the same rhythm but in contrary motion) is created in the final stretto. Here the lower-voice "false entry" is expanded with an extra sequence, and the middle voice statement that sets out in inversion is "lured" by the upper-voice entry to mold its last subphrase into the turn-figures known from the subject's beginning.

The fugue comprises only one counter-subject. Its rhythmic structure allows a division into three segments, yet these structural components do not function as separate subphrases but only as consecutive portions in the pursuit of a single purpose. The scope of the counter-subject is slightly blurred at its beginning, as was that of the subject at its end. Thus the F# in U: m. 5 can be regarded as the counter-subject's first note (if the subject is understood as ending on the last eighth-note of m. 4) or as the point of overlapping phrases, belonging at the same time to both elements. It is also possible to perceive the counter-subject as beginning on the second eighthnote of the measure. Taking a closer look at the segments one finds that, faithful to the requirements of contrapuntal independence of "partners," their confines do not coincide with those of the subject's subphrases. The first segment [d] consists only of eighth-notes and ends on the downbeat of m. 6. It shares with the beginning of the subject the pattern of half measure model and ascending sequence; therefore its independence is limited. The counter-subject's second segment [e] spans two measures. Moving exclusively in 16th-notes, it prolongs the previous ascent with an ornamental figure sequenced at half-measure intervals. The third and final segment [f] is scarcely one measure long. It begins with a scalar descent that sets out as a parallel to the subject but then bends backward and reaches the high G, thus disclosing its nature as yet another section under the overall purpose of a peak note ascent. From the counter-subject's beginning to this target note the underlying ascent thus progresses through an entire octave. This directedness distinguishes it sharply from the subject which, in its concluding portion, returns to the level from which it was launched.



The choice of an appropriate dynamic outline in the counter-subject is easy since the tension rises perceptibly throughout. The opposite, a continuous diminuendo, applies in the inversion of the counter-subject.

There are eight subject-free passages within this fugue.

E1	mm. 9-10	E5	mm. 47-50
E2	mm. 15-19	E6	mm. 54-60 ₄
E3	mm. 31-37	E7	mm. 64-69 ₄
E4	m. 42	E8	mm. 73-76

In addition, the five measures following the last subject statement (E9) present the cadence that re-establishes the tonic (mm. $82-83_1$) and a coda on a tonic pedal (mm. 83-86).

The episodes are almost exclusively built from three independent motifs. While the first two motifs are related and of only moderate melodic intensity, the third motif a truly lyrical quality and is thus the most conspicuous among the three. M1 is first presented in U: mm. 9-10₁. Its rhythm is characterized by uninterrupted 16th-notes that begin immediately after the first beat of one measure and end on the downbeat of the next. The pitch pattern is conceived in hidden two-part structure: one of the parts remains. as an indirect pedal, on a repeated note, while the other part describes a scalar motion. (The melodic part begins with a 16th-note upbeat, which is often mistaken as belonging to the background.) In the original appearance of m. 9 this scale falls, but it rises just as often (e.g., M: mm. 10-11); those cases will be referred to as M1 inversions. The concluding note on the downbeat serves as a harmonic resolution. In the original version, the resolution falls on the pitch level of the indirect pedal, whereas in the inversion (mm. 10-11) it sounds as a continuation of the melody. M2 enters as a companion to M1, with the original in M: mm. 9-10, and the inversion in U: mm. 10-11₁. It is not polyphonically independent but composed as a parallel to the melodic part of M1. Consequently its rhythm moves in regular eighth-notes. M3 emerges only in the second episode (see U: m. 17 and sequences). Unlike the two earlier episode motifs it is launched from the downbeat and ends somewhat indistinctly before the next bar line or on the ensuing downbeat, in that case overlapping with the beginning of the sequence. Its lyrical quality arises both from the melodic content of the 16th-note line and from the expressive syncopation on the second eighth-note of the measure.

As to the dynamic outline of the three motifs, both M1 and M2 represent simple lines that follow the pitch direction: crescendo in all ascending and diminuendo in all descending scalar motions. The distribution of these motifs in the eight episodes of the fugue is very dense. Based on the

material we can distinguish three episode types: E1, E4, E6, and E9 are all built on M1 and M2, while E3, E5, E7, and E8 neglect M2 in favor of the other two motifs. E2 is related to all of the others. It sets out with M1 in non-motivic surrounding; then combines an M1 inversion with an M2 parallel, and finally presents sequences of the M3/M1 pair, complemented by a neutral middle voice.

The relationship between the episodes is evident from the table above. E1 is related to E4 and also, though less closely, to E6. E5 and E7 are similar, and E8 shows analogy to the second segment of E3. E2 can be divided to reveal relationships to E1 and E4 in its first two measures, to E5 and E7 in its remainder. None of the episodes exhausts its function as a cadential close. In one instance, however, a closing formula determines the material of a final segment: see the do-si-do figure in the upper voice as well as the typical bass pattern in the first half of m. 69.

The role each of the episodes plays in the development of the composition also stems directly from its material. Those of the first type, based only on M1/M2, act as bridges, while those ending with descending M3/M1 sequences have concluding character. The two episodes featuring the M1 + scale combinations lie in-between; they provide more contrast to the primary material than the first type but lack any features of conclusive force. One might thus say that they insinuate a gap that they nevertheless span.

The basic character of this fugue is best interpreted as rather lively. This decision is supported mainly by the pitch pattern with its leaps and ornamental figures. The rhythmic pattern contains four melodically relevant note values, three already in the subject, and additional 32nd-notes in the variation of M1, but all these values fit smoothly into a generally simple rhythmic structure. The tempo is swift, playful if not outright virtuoso, allowing for an energetic and non-superficial touch. The articulation demands non legato for the eighth-notes and quarter-notes and different kinds of legato for the 16th- and the few 32nd-notes. Among these, truly melodic quality seems appropriate for M3 while an equally dense sound, though for different reasons, suits the hidden two-part structure of M1. Ornamental 16th-notes like the turn figures and scale portions in the subject and the longer scales in E3 and E8 are best rendered in quasi legato. An ideal proportion of tempo between the prelude and the fugue is founded on the larger pulses of each: one quarter-note in the prelude corresponds with half a measure in the fugue. Approximate metronome settings: 80 for the beats (quarter-notes) in the prelude and the compound beats (dotted quarter-notes) in the fugue.

The fugue features a number of ornaments, namely in mm. 22, 25-26, 64, 69, and 78. Before pondering any of them, the general question of the tempo of ornaments in this fugue must be settled. If they are to shake "twice as fast as the shorter note values," the dispute arises as to which of the values, 16th-notes or 32nd-notes, are to be regarded as "the shorter" rhythmic units. In accordance with both the virtuosity of the piece and the ornamental nature characterizing many of the 16th-notes, it seems advisable to regard these as the values to be doubled in the trills. The few 32nd-notes will then appear as additional written-out slides and turns.

The ornaments can be grouped as follows: The mordent symbols in mm. 22 and 78 designate long trills, as the spelled-out suffixes indicate. The first, approached stepwise, begins on the main note and allows for five trill notes (one 16th- + four 32nd-notes) before the suffix. The second begins on the upper neighbor note and moves in regular 32nd-notes. The two trills in the inverted subject statement are more problematic. Regarding both pitch and metric position, the ornamented notes lead into possible resolutions. Yet the notes providing these resolutions do not belong to the same subphrases. Performers can draw three kinds of conclusions from this predicament: (a) to ignore the original phrasing and link each trill, with a proper suffix, to the subsequent note; (b) to ignore the trill symbol and play the subject as it was introduced, i.e., unornamented; (c) to respect both ornament and phrasing by playing a short, mordent-like embellishment of only five notes. The two trills in mm. 64 and 69 share the same ending: they do not resolve on any appropriate strong beat but end in a tied note. Both therefore conclude without a suffix and should stop before the beginning of the tie. Convention suggests that the halt be as late as possible before the last bar line; however, it is unlikely that Bach had this in mind in the second case as it is technically impossible to maintain the trill motion in the second half of m. 70 where the right hand is busy with the counter-subject. A feasible as well as musically convincing solution is to play both trills equally long. The one in m. 63, covering slightly less than a measure, would serve as a model for the one in mm. 69-70, which would then come to a halt before the middle voice enters. (By the way, these interrupted trills do not, despite their beginning on the main note, prolong the first note as they are not "note-filling" ornaments.)



Several indicators help in determining the structure. The order and shape of the subject entries define some of the boundaries between sections. It seems reasonable to assume that the first three statements in identical shape belong to one section, that consequently the next three statements in inversion establish the second section, and that the appearance of the first stretto marks the beginning of a new section. Two subject statements sound in reduced ensemble, namely those beginning in mm. 38 and 51. These are therefore likely to constitute section openings. The cadential close in the first half of m. 69 indicates the end of a section.

The role played by the episodes sheds additional light on the question of structure. These facts confirm what has already been stated: E1 connects the second and third statements of section I, and E2 rounds this first section off at m. 20₁. E3, "spanning a larger gap," connects the three inverted subject entries of section II with the beginning of section III, marked by the entry in reduced ensemble (m. 38). Sections II and III, while distinct for several of the reasons stated above, thus form a superimposed group owing to the episode that links them. E4 connects the two statements, one original and one inverted, of the third section. The concluding E5 rounds this third section of f on m. 51_1 , where the fourth section begins with another entry in reduced ensemble. E6 connects the two strettos of the fourth section. The concluding E7 rounds this fourth section off on the middle beat of m. 69, additionally enhanced by the closing formula. E8, "spanning a larger gap," connects the single entry opening section V with the following stretto. The analogy of E8 and E3 suggests that the fifth section is to be regarded as structurally corresponding to the joint second and third sections that, as shown above, form a group.

As these details reveal, structural correspondences in this fugue are complex. The first two sections feature an obvious analogy in the number of their entries and the consistency in which these are presented. The impression is that of a double exposition: first, of the subject in its original shape, then of its inversion. Yet another "exposition" occurs in the fourth section, which establishes the strettos. The second large-scale analogy is that between the second and third sections on the one hand and the fifth section on the other.

The harmonic outline of the composition is straightforward. Both the first and second sections remain on the tonic, the third section is in E minor (the relative minor of the tonic), the fourth section in D major (the dominant), and the fifth section returns to G major, approaching it from an entry on the dominant and crowning it with the unusual statement on the third of the home key (see U: mm. 79-82).



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In each section, the tension rises from the first to the last entry, due either to an increasing number of participating voices (I, III, and IV), the enhanced presentation of the subject (V: from single entry to stretto), or the analogy with the first section (II). Section II is dynamically more intense than the first since its three entries are launched in full ensemble and follow one another without interruption. Section III falls back because of both its reduced range and its minor mode, appearing almost as a softer appendix. Section IV develops to an even higher dynamic level. Finally, section V inverts the situation in the pair to which it is analogous (II/III \approx V) by setting out from the softer level of the single entry and evolving in a powerful increase toward the "stretto with parallel tail."