

## WTC I/18 in G# minor – Prelude

The G#-minor prelude is composed in strict polyphony. With the exception of the familiar voice splitting in the final chord and some irregularities of voice leading in the three initial measures, it is devised in consistent three-part texture. The predominance of a single motif (see U: mm. 1-2<sub>1</sub>) and the initial imitation at the octave characterize this prelude as a three-part invention.

Once the home key G# minor has been established in two brief progressions (mm. 1-2<sub>1</sub>, 2-3<sub>1</sub>), the first modulation occurs in mm. 4-5 with the cadential steps IV-V-I of B major, the tonic relative. As both the imitation of the motif and the first episode have by now been introduced, we should regard this cadence as the conclusion of the first structural unit. Corroboration comes with the subsequent motivic statement which, reminiscent of section beginnings in a fugue, appears in reduced ensemble, i.e., with a rest in the lower voice. At the same time, the fact that listeners expect the third entry of the principal motif in the middle voice and that this expectation is met at the beginning of the next harmonic progression threads the two passages together to a larger unit, i.e., section I.

The question where the second section ends is trickier. One could tie this decision to the ensuing return to the tonic, and thus to the perfect cadence concluding at m. 10<sub>1</sub>. This interpretation can be supported by the observation that the subsequent motivic statement is the first in the piece to appear in inversion. Alternatively, one could base one's reading on the cadential close in m. 9<sub>1</sub>, and thus take the progression as leading to the subdominant area. This interpretation can be supported by an observation on the structural level: The next section would then begin, as did the first, with two statements followed by two measures laid out as a variation of mm. 3-4. As this is the only instance in the prelude where a passage is taken up with recognizable resemblance albeit with exchanged voices, it seems important enough. The correspondence sheds light on the analogy between the beginnings of the first and second sections and, if one decides to take this as significant for the interpretation of the prelude's structural design, even invites a similar conclusion for the beginning of the third section.

Depending on the alternative explained above, the layout of this three-part invention can thus be read in two quite different ways, as the following tables show:

I	mm. 1-10 <sub>1</sub> (1-5 <sub>1</sub> , 5-10 <sub>1</sub> )	tonic, relative major, tonic
II	mm. 10-18 <sub>1</sub> (10-13 <sub>1</sub> , 13-18 <sub>1</sub> )	tonic, minor domin., subdom.
III	mm. 18-27 <sub>1</sub> (18-22 <sub>1</sub> , 22-27 <sub>1</sub> )	subd., tonic, tonic confirmed
IV	mm. 27-29	tonic

or:

I	mm. 1-9 <sub>1</sub> (1-5 <sub>1</sub> , 5-9 <sub>1</sub> )	tonic, relative major, subdom.
II	mm. 9-17 <sub>1</sub> (9-13 <sub>1</sub> , 13-17 <sub>1</sub> )	subdom., minor dominant, tonic
III	mm. 17-29	tonic confirmed

The rhythmic pattern of this prelude is basically simple. This suggests a rather lively character. At the same time, the slightly subdued spirit inherent in many minor-key compositions is reinforced here by the specific melodic structure of the principal motif, which peaks on the minor sixth and falls back to the minor third. To accommodate both traits, the tempo of the prelude should be fairly swift, without conveying the impression of energetic activity in the eighth-notes. Instead, a desirable effect is that of a gentle swing in half-measure pulses. An articulation that matches this basic character demands legato for the 16th-notes and non legato for the longer values. In order to express the nuances hinted at above, the non legato in the principal motif and all figures immediately deriving from it should be very delicate. In the larger leaps (M: mm. 3-4 etc.), the separation can be slightly more pronounced, and a distinctly detached style is required in the cadential-bass patterns. Exceptions occur in the three do-si-do formulas demanding legato (L: mm. 1-2, M: mm. 13-14, U: mm. 2-3).

The score comprises only one ornament, which is represented by a mordent symbol (see U: m. 13). As the note to be ornamented resolves duly onto the following downbeat, this ornament must be interpreted as a note-filling trill. It begins accordingly on the upper neighbor note, shakes in 32nd-notes and concludes with a suffix (D#-E#).

The prelude builds entirely on the principal motif and its inversion. What appears as a kind of counter-motif (see, e.g. M: mm. 1-2<sub>1</sub>) recurs only in m. 2 but never again thereafter. The principal motif is thus solely responsible for the character and development in the prelude.

The episodes (or motif-free passages) also derive their material from the same source. The first episode type makes use of the 16th-note group from the motif's head, transposing its second three-note group down a fourth and sequencing this newly-assembled figure twice in descending direction (see U: mm. 3-4, and L: mm. 11-12). The second episode type

presents the same figure (L: mm. 22-23) along with the inversion of the original 16th-note group (M: m. 25, U: m. 26) and a version of the group in its first shape but with a broken triad at the end (L: mm. 19-21). In addition to all these transformations of the motif's head, this episode also recalls the motif's tail (mm. 19-21, in imitation between U and M).

In order to determine the dynamic processes in this prelude, one may wish to distinguish a varying intensity among the statements of the motif. Intensity is created here not only, as is generally true for all polyphonic compositions, by the number of voices surrounding the statement or the mode in which it is set, but also by the nature of the accompanying material. In this prelude, Bach seems to use parallels as a characteristic means. The following hierarchy can be deduced from this observation:

- The lowest level of intensity is expressed in statements quoting the motif without any doubling (mm. 9 and 10, 15 and 17, 27 and 28).
- Slightly more emphasis is created by the parallel of the motif's tail (mm. 1, 2, and 7); less, where the doubling is set in contrary motion (as in mm. 8 and 16).
- The fortification of the 16th-notes alone generates even greater density (mm. 5, 6, 14 and, somewhat more indirectly, m. 13).
- This last level of intensity is exceeded only once where both halves of the motif are doubled. In m. 18, the 16th-notes appear in parallel and the eighth-notes are matched in contrary motion.

Relating these observations to the structural features of the prelude one detects that

- the endings of all sections appear in lessened intensity;
- in the first and second sections, the climax occurs immediately after the diminuendo resulting from the episode's descending sequences and the mid-section cadence;
- the first section begins in moderate intensity, with two statements, while the second section, which introduces the motif's inversion, sets out with only one statement of low intensity;
- the third section contains only one complete statement of the motif that, appearing at the beginning of the section, exhibits the highest level of intensity in the entire piece;
- the coda returns to a very relaxed state.

Here is a graphic representation of the "invention," in the second of the two readings offered above, highlighting the appearance of structurally analogous sections.

bars	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
U	M			1					M
M						M			
L		M					M	M	

bars	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
U		M <sub>inv</sub>		1 var		M		M <sub>inv</sub>	
M	M							M <sub>inv</sub>	
L					M				

bars	17	18	19	20	...	27	28	29
U		M						
M								M <sub>inv</sub>
L	M <sub>inv</sub>						M	

### WTC I/18 in G# minor – Fugue

This subject encompasses two measures. Beginning on the second beat of m. 1, its upbeat character is attenuated by the length of the first note, which seems to stand still rather than lead anywhere. After a modulation to the dominant key, the subject ends with a figure very unusual for a melodic line: a cadential-bass pattern (see G#-G#-A#-A#-D#).

There are two subphrases. The first, ending on D# (m. 2<sub>2</sub>), is characterized by rhythmic variety (a quarter-note, several eighth-notes, and two 16th-notes) and an emotional pitch line (two leading-notes: F\*-G# and C\*-D#, as well as one high-tension interval: G#-C\*). The second subphrase comprises only regular eighth-notes in a line that is melodically very low key. Phrasing is thus not determined by structural features (like sequences) or pitch level in this fugue, but by a drastic contrast in melodic intensity.

The pitch outline in the subject's first measure displays only stepwise motion, circling around the key note. The return to G# at m. 2<sub>1</sub> is followed immediately by a high-tension interval, represented here by a tritone leap

to the artificial leading-note of the fifth scale degree. The resolution of this leading-note marks the end of the first subphrase. The ensuing major-sixth leap is thus not a melodic interval but rather a split between the two subphrases. The second subphrase comprises whole-tone steps and a perfect fifth. Conspicuous note repetitions on the fourth and fifth scale degrees of D# minor enhance the impression of a cadential-bass pattern. Having observed this one understands why these notes seem to convey so little melodic message. They are harmonic notes (as representatives of the chords they imply), and their significance is vertical rather than horizontal.

The subject's harmonic background is most intriguing in a segment where it might be least expected: the eighth-note-descent B-A#-G#. The melodic return to the keynote at m. 2<sub>1</sub> is not matched by a similar return in the harmonic progression. On the contrary, after an initial alternation between tonic and dominant (G# minor and D# major, with or without their seventh) in m. 1, this downbeat represents the harmonically most active step in this phrase, i.e., that to the secondary dominant triggering the modulation. The melodic resolution of the artificial leading-note C\* thus coincides with the harmonic resolution of the diminished chord into the new tonic. The freshly established key is then confirmed in a cadential progression.

(gis :) i V<sup>(7)</sup> i V<sup>(7)</sup> vii/V V  
(dis :) vii i ii V<sup>7</sup> i

The subject's main climax occurs in the first subphrase. The melodic and harmonic developments both favor the first beat of the second measure, where G#-C\* constitutes a high-tension interval while at the same time representing the pivot chord of the modulation. The end of the first subphrase on the measure's third eighth-note provides the resolution to both the harmonic tension and the melodic leading-note, thus generating a steep decrease after the gradual increase during the first measure. By contrast, the dynamic outline of the second subphrase is very gentle. The first note (F#) serves as an upbeat to the subdominant representative G#, which is followed by an even relaxation. Although the subject's two subphrases could thus hardly be more contrasting, they nonetheless complement one another symmetrically with regard to tension: the gradual rise through most of the first subphrase is answered by a gradual decay through most of the second, the sudden release after the expressive first climax finds its counterpart in the concise upbeat to the secondary climax.

The subject appears altogether twelve times.

1.	mm. 1-3	T	7.	mm. 17-19	T
2.	mm. 3-5	A	8.	mm. 19-21	A
3.	mm. 5-7	S	9.	mm. 24-26	S
4.	mm. 7-9	B	10.	mm. 26-28	B
5.	mm. 11-13	T	11.	mm. 32-34	T
6.	mm. 15-17	B	12.	mm. 37-39	S



Apart from the alteration of the first interval in the answer, no modifications of shape or length occur in the subject throughout the fugue. Inversions, parallel statements, or strettos are not used.

Bach invented two companions to the subject that appear repeatedly. However, just as the subject itself displays a somewhat unusual melodic line in its second subphrase, the counter-subjects also do not quite conform to ordinary expectations of polyphonic counter-parts. CS1 is introduced against the second subject statement in mm. 3-5. It begins with an upbeat (which is later occasionally dropped or varied). The following long note and particularly the ascending groups on the sixth and seventh eighth-notes of the measure sound so much like a parallel to the beginning of the subject that they may hardly pass as contrapuntal. Only the middle segment with its sequences of the ascending figure leads a polyphonically independent life (T: m. 3-4 F# to B), while what follows thereafter qualifies as a very traditional closing formula (G#-A#-F#-G#). Notwithstanding this limited independence, CS1 accompanies almost all subject statements, with exceptions occurring only in the entries in mm. 24-26 and 26-28, where CS1 is omitted altogether, as well as in the final entry, where its beginning and end are considerably varied. CS2 is also first presented in its expected place against the third subject statement (T: mm. 5-7). Its characteristic features are the syncopated fourth leap and the descent in quarter-notes concluding in a tie. The beginning as stated in m. 5 with upbeat eighth-note and quarter-note (this value again in rhythmic parallel to the subject's initial note) is later dropped or varied, just like that of the first counter-subject. The suspension created by the tie at the end of CS2 redefines the harmonic surroundings of the subject's final note as still awaiting resolution. Statements accompanied by this counter-subject are thus unlikely at section endings. CS2 recurs four times, in mm. 11-13 (A), 15-17 (S), 19-21 (B), and 32-34 (S).

The phrase structure in the two counter-subjects is worthy of closer inspection. While the way in which the material is connected parallels the subject: a melodious segment followed by a traditional formula, the segments in CS1 are strung together in such a manner that they build a single curve without any need for partitioning. One step further, CS2 consists of an indivisible unit with regard to both structure and material. In terms of dynamics, neither counter-subject engenders a tension process independent of the one found in the subject; CS1 meets the subject's second (weaker) climax, while the peak of CS2 coincides with the subject's first (stronger) climax.

There are six subject-free passages in this fugue.

E1	mm. 9-11	E4	mm. 28-32
E2	mm. 13-15	E5	mm. 34-37
E3	mm. 21-24	E6	mm. 39-41

The material of these episodes comprises two salient features. The first, very unusual in Bach's fugues, is a homophonic formula (see mm. 9-10<sub>1</sub>), made up of the cadential-bass pattern from the subject's second subphrase in the bass, a slightly extended version of the second segment from CS1 in the soprano, and chordal filling notes in alto and tenor (which will later, from m. 13 onwards, be substituted by the last two notes from CS2). The other conspicuous feature (see mm. 21-23) is polyphonic in design; it is a motif arising in an imitative setting.

The distribution of these two components of secondary material in the episodes is very straightforward:

E1	formula + sequence (ascending)
E2	formula + sequence (descending)
E3	motif in B/A + sequences (ascending)
E4	motif in A/S + sequence (ascending) = E4a
	formula + sequence (descending) = E4b
E5	formula (varied) + sequences/imitation
E6	formula (varied) + cadential closing formula

As can be seen from the table, there are several relationships among the episodes. E1 serves as the model for E2 and E4b as well as for E5 and

the first half of E6, while E3 is taken up in E4a. The role played by each episode in the development of the composition also stems immediately from the material employed. The episodes that are based on the formula give a concluding impression due to the salient cadential pattern, while those displaying the imitative motif are either accompanied by a similar cadential-bass line (as in mm. 28-30) or followed by an explicit cadential close (see the perfect cadence in A# major in m. 24).

Triggered by the two-faced subject, the character of the entire fugue is ambivalent. It changes constantly between calm, melodious lines of high expression and cadential patterns of almost neutral tone quality. As a result, a definition of the basic character must be attempted separately for the two subject segments and the material resulting from them. In the first subphrase, the pitch pattern with its poignant leading-notes and tritone interval as well as the corresponding rhythmic variety suggests a rather calm basic character. In the second subphrase, by contrast, all melodic expression seems aborted in favor of a non-committal formula.

The tempo is moderate in order to accommodate the leading-notes (F\*-G#) and high-tension intervals (G#-C\*) appearing in eighth-note (m. 2) or even 16th-note rhythm (mm. 21-23, 28-29). The articulation should reflect the ambiguous character depicted above. In the subject's first subphrase, the appropriate articulation demands legato throughout. In the second subphrase, however, non legato articulation is needed to convey the cadential character. Both the pitch pattern with its note repetitions and perfect-fifth interval and the regular rhythmic pattern support this interpretation. Correspondingly, the remaining material also divides into two fields. All cadential formulas maintain the detached style, while the motif and the counter-subjects tend toward a melodious character. CS2 is basically legato; only the fourth leap may be detached. The episode motif with its complex rhythm and semitone as well as high-tension intervals is entirely legato. Only CS1 shares the ambiguity of the subject: its first segment is legato while in the second the non legato intention is enhanced by the written rests.

The most straightforward tempo proportion between the prelude and the fugue is probably also the best. It is achieved by equating half a measure in the prelude with a quarter-note in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: 60 for the compound beats in the prelude and the quarter-notes in the fugue.) No ornaments need to be considered in this fugue.

When trying to determine the structure of the G#-minor fugue, only the first section is unambiguous as it is distinguished quite clearly by the

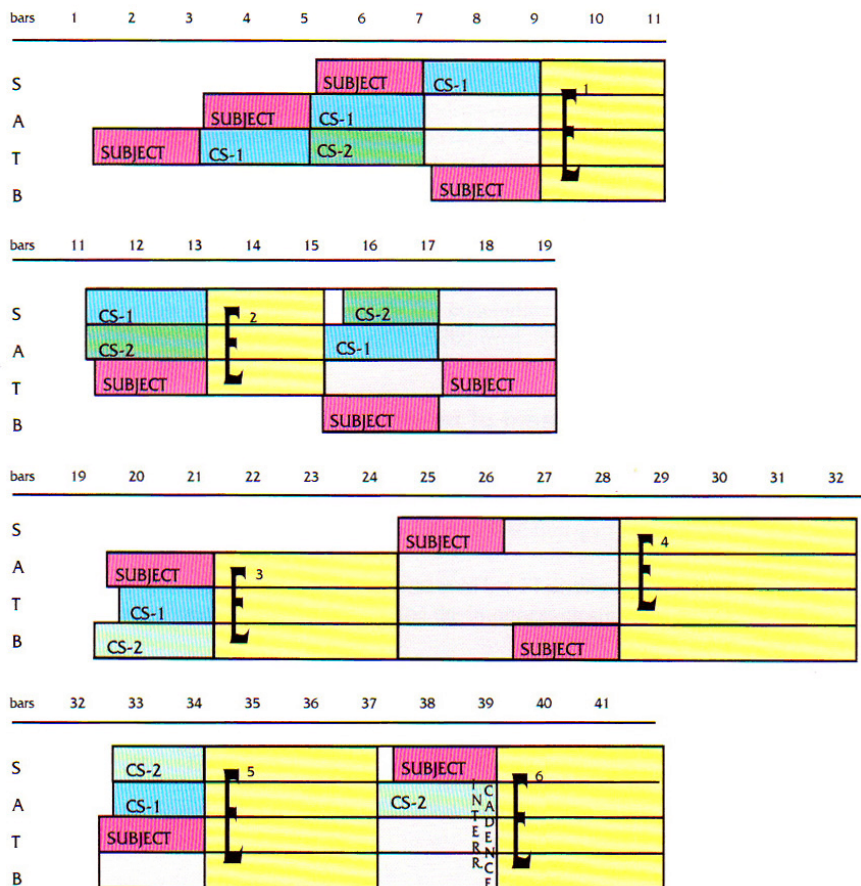


entering order of the voices. Four subject statements, presented in uninterrupted succession by the four parts involved in this fugue, are followed by the concluding first episode. The next statement appears in reduced ensemble and thus confirms the beginning of a new section at m. 11<sub>1</sub>. In the absence of any assistance from explicit cadential formulas and structural analogies in the further course of the fugue, the reduced number of voices involved in a subject statement as an indicator for the beginning of a section must be complemented by observations concerning the material. Reductions of the ensemble appear two more times. In mm. 19-21, the soprano is resting during the entry of the alto, and in mm. 24-26, the bass is temporarily suspended during much of the soprano statement, although the first two beats of the entry sound in complete four-part texture. The recurrence of the tenor statement in m. 17 distinguishes this subject entry as a redundant one, thus signifying the imminent closure of a section.

As the final statement of the first section (mm. 7-9) and the final statement of the fugue (mm. 37-39) both appear polyphonically less intense than the statements preceding them, it may make sense to look into the appearance of counter-subjects throughout the fugue. If one assumes, as a hypothesis, that Bach may have composed lessening density of contrapuntal material towards the end of each section, the following groups can be established:

mm.	1	3	5	7	11	15	17	19	24	26	32	37
S	T	A	S	B	T	B	T	A	S	B	T	S
CS1	-	*	*	*	*	*	-	*	-	-	*	(*)
CS2	-	-	*	-	*	*	-	*	-	-	*	-

The harmonic outline of this fugue describes a very simple curve. The minor dominant serving as the secondary key is reached in m. 11. However, as the subject itself in its original version also modulates to this key, this D#-minor cadence does not seem to establish a truly new tonal center. Moreover, the ensuing statements still remain very closely linked to the original tonic: already the tenor entry in mm. 11-13 modulates back to G# minor, the bass entry follows with a subdominant-tonic version, and the redundant tenor statement closes once again on the minor dominant. Only the third section leads into new harmonic fields. Its first episode modulates from G# minor to A# major, the bass statement begins in F# major (the dominant relative) and concludes in B major (the tonic relative), and the second episode (E4) modulates back to the tonic G# minor.



This fugue seems singularly static with regard to tension. With the exception of the three initial subject statements, all increases in texture in the course of a section are annihilated by a simultaneous decrease in polyphonic intensity. The dynamics of this fugue thus live entirely from the contrast—particularly in the third section—between subject-dominated passages and episodes.