

## WTC I/21 in B $\flat$ major – Prelude

The B $\flat$  major prelude is in its texture essentially non-polyphonic. The performer's two hands act either in alternating motions or join forces for many-voiced chords. Never does one of them establish a pattern without the other.

There are three conspicuous figures. Two of them are characterized by an aspect of keyboard technique rather than by particular melodic or rhythmic shapes. The first appears as a pattern of open-position broken chords, executed in a complementary play between the two hands. This figure prevails in mm. 1-7 and 9, after which it recurs only in the final m. 21. The second figure is a single-voiced wavy run, also kept in virtuoso style, i.e., in the performers' own choice of a complementary use of both hands. This figure is introduced in mm. 3-4 and taken up in m. 8 and in parts of mm. 10-20. The third and last component creates a contrast to the two one-track figures described before insofar as it engages both hands simultaneously, creating a dotted-note chordal pattern (see mm. 11, 13, 15 and, in modified rhythm, mm. 17-18). The composition thus recalls several Baroque genres: the toccata, the fantasy, and the French overture. As there are no real melodic features and, except for the short dotted-note figures, no prominent rhythms, the aspects that solely characterize the piece are, on the one hand, the virtuoso layout, on the other hand, the harmonic progressions and the sequential patterns within it.

The first harmonic progression concludes in the first half of m. 3, with the perfect cadence in the home key B $\flat$  major. Yet while this B $\flat$ -major chord provides the harmonic resolution to the preceding F $^7$  chord, the pitch position of the bass with its leap of one and a half octaves in m. 3 $_1$  counteracts any true relaxation. Instead, the downbeat of m. 3 doubles as the beginning of a new structural unit. The second harmonic progression is more extended. The music modulates to the dominant F major, which first appears by way of a plagal cadence in mm. 5 $_3$ -6 $_3$ . The seventh E $\flat$ , however, added at the last moment, converts the F-major chord into a V $^7$  and thus once again refers back to B $\flat$  major. The dominant key is only established with the authentic cadence that, complete with a traditional cadential-bass pattern, concludes at m. 10 $_1$  (with a possible passive extension throughout the broken F-major triad in the first half of m. 10). This cadential close

must be regarded as a structural caesura. Understanding this is particularly important since the virtuoso 32nd-note pattern continues uninterrupted. It therefore happens easily that the structural partition is either overlooked or misplaced after the D on m. 11<sub>1</sub>, which already represents the first step into the subsequent harmonic and structural unit. The prelude thus comprises only two sections: mm. 1-10: tonic to dominant and mm. 10-21: dominant to tonic.

Both the very regular rhythmic structure with almost continuous 32nd-note motion and the broken-chord patterns indicate a rather lively basic character. As for the tempo, this virtuoso piece should give a very brilliant impression and may be played almost as fast as is technically possible. (What is swift and brilliant, however, is the surface pattern, not so much the actual pulse of the piece, the quarter-notes.) Whether this tempo and character are valid throughout the entire prelude is a question frequently discussed. In one of the manuscripts, the introduction of the dotted-note rhythm pattern in m. 11 is marked *Adagio*. What are we to make of the fact that this indication did obviously not form part of the original layout but was added later? One possible interpretation is that Bach could have decided to add this heading on the spur of the moment because a performer (student?) played in a character that he deemed too light to be appropriate; in this case the indication may refer to a contrast in touch and expressivity rather than to any considerable change of tempo. Or, basically along the same lines, even if Bach originally estimated that an intended change of character was expressed clearly enough by the rhythmic hint at the style of the French overture and did not need any explicit verbal invitation, he may have added *Adagio* to suggest a freer treatment of tempo—rubato. (The two extreme interpretations, either to play through the entire piece without any change of attitude, or to play the second half twice as slowly as the first, are the least likely solutions.)

The appropriate articulation includes non legato for the eighth-notes and quasi legato for the 32nd-notes. Touch should vary with the character of the components: lightly bouncing non legato combined with a very crisp quasi legato in mm. 1-10 and 19-20, a heavier detached style (possibly combined with a denser legato) in mm. 11-18.



The only ornament in this piece is demanding. The downbeat of m. 19 is marked with a compound ornament that, in correct execution, would encompass eight notes and end in a tie-prolongation, a density not at all easy to realize in the desirable speed.

The chief processes in the prelude rest on the facts described above. The first phrase is determined entirely by figure 1. It appears in a pattern of descending half-measure sequences and is rounded off by a half cadence. The descending sequences are counter-balanced in the following phrase by two ascending sequences built from combinations of figures 1 and 2. The third phrase picks up the ascending motion, from B $\flat$  through an octave to A, beginning in straightforward chromatic steps and continuing in a diatonic passage with octave displacements. While the ascent presents itself in figure-1 pattern, figure 2 in m. 8 returns in a double curve to the low E, the leading-note of the long-anticipated dominant. A one-measure cadential pattern with figure 1 confirms this key and with it the prelude's first half.

In m. 10 Bach subtly creates the impression of both rounding off and, at the same time, announcing something new. While the first half of the prelude is made up entirely of the two figures with open-position broken chords and scalar runs, the tail of its final cadence introduces a combination of the two figures: a pattern that, like figure 2, uses one-track texture but, like figure 1, moves in broken chords. This combination (here referred to as figure 1+2), turns out to frame the second half of the piece.

The first statement of the dotted-note figure 3, presented in m. 11, is linked to its two descending sequences by extensive statements of figure 2 whose dive and soar respectively span almost three octaves. Despite the inverted direction of the run in the second statement of the figure, the listener can still perceive the continuing sequential pattern. After the second sequence, the recurrence of figure 1+2 seems to announce the impending close of this section. Yet once again the addition of a seventh redefines the tonic triad and thus diverts the cadence. Another statement of figure 1+2 leads to the compound ornament before one measure each of figures 2 and 1 complete the prelude's larger frame in symmetrical fashion.

### **WTC I/21 in B $\flat$ major – Fugue**

The subject sets out after an eighth-note rest, extends through four entire measures, and ends at m. 5<sub>1</sub>, where the D represents the return to the tonic after the F<sup>7</sup> chord in m. 4<sub>2,3</sub>. A closer look at the phrase structure reveals three subphrases in the pattern [a a' b]. These are easily distinguishable once the sequential pattern is recognized behind its veil of ornamentation: compare the initial subphrase, F-G-F-B $\flat$ -D-C, with its sequence, an embellished G-A-G-C-E $\flat$ -D, followed by a consequent around A-C-E $\flat$ -D.

Phrasing in the subject therefore occurs after the downbeats of mm. 2 and 3, with exactly one measure length for each of the two subphrases, while the subsequent two measures represent a single unit.

The interval organization in this subject includes sixths, fourths, and seconds in the eighth-notes and predominantly small intervals in the essentially ornamental 16th-notes. As the sixths occur in weak metrical positions (i.e., after the beat, not toward it), these large leaps do not convey emotional tension but an energetically bouncing temperament. Corresponding with this lively interval pattern, the rhythmic pattern throughout the fugue is very simple, consisting almost exclusively of eighth-notes and 16th-notes. Even the regular syncopations in the main contrapuntal voice (see U: mm. 5-7 etc.) cannot diminish this effect.

The subject's harmonic background is characterized by two active steps within the first two subphrases: both times a simpler chord underlying the 5/8 upbeat is followed by an incomplete minor-seventh chord. The third measure concludes the cadence with a straightforward  $V^7-I$ . The harmonic progression thus ends already at m. 4<sub>1</sub>. Yet for the dance-like character Bach intended for this fugue, he prefers phrases with an even number of measures. The additional eight eighth-notes, consisting of an exact repetition of the ones just heard, thus appear as a metric complement with neither melodic nor harmonic "information."

I ii<sup>7</sup>      vii<sup>7</sup> iii<sup>7</sup>      V<sup>7</sup>    I      V<sup>7</sup>    I

The subject's dynamic design should convey the phrase structure, the metric organization, and the harmonic features. A distinctly virtuoso aspect enters with the ascending sequences and their growing amount of embellishment. Within the first two subphrases, the climax falls on the respective downbeats—both because this is the point of harmonic emphasis and because any other accent would blur the metric structure. (If, as happens easily for lack of attention, the peak notes B $\flat$  and C are accented, this will necessarily give listeners the mistaken impression that the subject begins with three upbeat eighth-notes followed by the first downbeat on B $\flat$ .) By the time the third subphrase is approached, the meter is firmly established. Therefore, the fact that this incomplete sequence comes without what was previously the climax and instead just relaxes from the E $\flat$  ( $V^7$ , m. 3<sub>3</sub>) to the final D (I, m. 5<sub>1</sub>), suggests that in this subphrase, highest pitch and dynamic peak coincide. With regard to the relation between the three

subphrase climaxes C, D, and E $\flat$ , the work's virtuoso character favors the high E $\flat$ . However, in case a performer prefers an interpretation that seeks more serious nuances in this fugue and its subject, it is also possible to regard m. 3<sub>1</sub> as the strongest climax and the two final measures as a less intense tail to the more substantial main body.

This fugue comprises only eight complete and subject entries as well as an incomplete one.

1. mm. 1-5	U	5. mm. 22-26	M
2. mm. 5-9	M	6. mm. 26-30	L
3. mm. 9-13	L	(7. mm. 35-37)	M
4. mm. 13-17	U	8. mm. 37-41	U
		9. mm. 41-45	M



Except for the interval adjustment in the tonal answer, the subject remains untouched throughout the fugue in detail as well as in shape. No stretto or parallel statement ever materializes. But ever after its first entry, it comes escorted by companions that remain faithful to the end. They are not, however, quite as independent from their leader as true contrapuntal technique would require, particularly in the case of the second companion, which runs largely in parallel to the subject. Although the term “counter-subject” might thus not seem appropriate in its strictest sense, the usual abbreviations are employed here for easier reference. CS1 is introduced in U: mm. 5-9. Its three subphrases coincide exactly with those of the subject. As in the subject, the first and second subphrases are related by ascending sequence (although the first subphrase appears more elaborate than the second here). Also as in the subject, the third subphrase consists of a one-measure model followed by its repetition. (This subphrase encompasses a four-note parallel to the subject; see m. 8<sub>1</sub>.) In terms of the dynamic outline, the three climaxes fall slightly earlier than those in the subject. The prominent features within the first two subphrases are the final syncopations, which capture the peak of tension. In the third subphrase, the short upbeat-like ascent preceding the protracted note repetition indicates a soft crescendo, which is followed by a long diminuendo. CS2 seems more like a filler than a polyphonic partner. Introduced in U: mm. 9-13, it consists of four short gestures interrupted by rests. The first two, again conceived as ascending sequences, complement the two 16th-notes missing in the rhythmic patterns established by the subject and CS1. Their second note sounds in unison with the other companion, and their final eighth-note,

rather than fulfilling any melodic purpose, complements the downbeat harmonies. The (identical) third and fourth figures blatantly double the subject's segments in parallel sixths. To look for a meaningful development of musical tension within this highly dependent element would mean to overrate its importance.

The fugue comprises only three subject-free passages: E1 = mm. 17-22, E2 = mm. 30-35, and E3 = mm. 45-48. All of them are directly related to the primary material and can be divided into only two patterns, both established in E1. In mm. 17-19, the subject's third subphrase is sequenced a whole-tone higher while the accompanying companions are imitated in inverted voices. A similar process occurs in mm. 45-47. Here the middle voice repeats the second half of the previous subject entry an octave lower, while the second half of CS1 moves from upper to lower voice (and thus two octaves down) and that of CS2 from lower to upper voice (one octave up). In mm. 19-22, E1 is reduced to two-part texture and the material employed derives entirely from the subject. The upper voice continues in sequences of the measure-3 pattern (now descending by steps), while the lower voice takes up the first subphrase in inversion (compare L: m. 19 with U: m. 1), which is then also sequenced in descending steps. This combination recurs similarly in E2, where mm. 30-33 feature the inverted subject head in the upper voice (the descending sequences are underpinned only at their very ends by doubling in the middle voice), the lower voice recalls the descending sequences of the measure-3 pattern, and mm. 33-35 continue this process in inverted voices. The only difference is that the filling voice is now more complete.

The only episode measures that remain are the two cadential measures at the end of the composition. These feature a cadential-bass pattern and a traditional closing formula in the upper voice. As all these passages are designed in sequential patterns, the ascending or descending direction of

each sequence determines the dynamic tendency and, with it, the role each episode plays in the course of the fugue. Thus E1 momentarily surpasses the tension expressed in the fourth subject entry but subsequently recedes with each measure. E2 is conceived, despite its two-fold structure, as a single decreasing line, and the first segment of E3 resembles an echo from which the cadential close resurfaces.

One can thus state that this fugue is only rudimentarily contrapuntal in texture and entirely determined by its subject. At the same time, the subject remains virtually unmodified throughout the composition. This may suggest that what matters in this fugue it is not the material, and that the chief task fulfilled here by the subject is to establish the vigor and mood upon which the entire piece depends.

The basic character is lively. This is supported both by the simple rhythmic structure and by the pitch pattern with its frequent leaps and its ornamental 16th-notes. The tempo may be very swift, particularly since the demands of polyphonic playing—and hearing—in this fugue are almost negligible. The articulation combines an energetically bouncing non legato for the eighth-notes with a crisp quasi legato for the 16th-notes. Ornaments do not occur in this fugue. The relative tempo of the prelude to the fugue uses the larger pulse for a proportion: a half-note in the prelude translates into a dotted half-note in the fugue. Approximate metronome settings: prelude beats = 72, fugue beats = 108.

In the absence of changes in texture or conspicuous cadential patterns, an analysis of the structure must rely on the episodes and the harmonic development. As has been shown, the episodes are related with one another in that two patterns introduced in E1 return in reverse order in E3 and E2. This may be interpreted as suggesting an axis symmetry ( $a+b \text{ — } b, a$ ) and can thus hint at a design in which the first section would find its correspondence in the joined second and third sections. The tonal organization supports this view. The four initial subject entries remain in the sphere of *B<sub>b</sub> major*. The first episode then modulates via the relative key *G minor* to its dominant *D Major*. The fifth and sixth subject statements represent the sphere of the relative-minor key (with *G minor* in mm. 22-26 and *C minor*, the subdominant relative, in mm. 26-30). The ensuing episode confirms the key of *C minor*. Thereafter, the incomplete statement leads back to the major mode. Thus the next complete statement can enter in the subdominant *E<sub>b</sub> major*, followed by the return to the tonic in the final statement.

A big dramatic development is clearly not the purpose of this virtuoso fugue. Once the subject and its two companions have been established, there is little distinction between successive entries. The interpretation of

tension will thus have to concentrate on two features: the differentiation of color between the (outer) sections in the major and the (middle) section in the minor mode, and the gesture expressed in the episodes.

