

## WTC I/23 in B major – Prelude

The material of this prelude derives almost entirely from a short ornamental figure introduced in the first half measure. There is only one instance in the piece where this motif is momentarily absent. The prelude thus belongs to the motivically determined compositions. Its texture is polyphonic, with three parts to which Bach adds a fourth only in the final measures (after a splitting of the upper voice in m. 16<sub>3</sub>).

The first harmonic closure occurs at m. 2<sub>3</sub> where an F<sup>#</sup>7 chord, suggested in the upper and middle voices above a sustained tonic pedal, resolves onto the tonic. The tonic root is “silent”—fading in the sustained lower voice and implicit in the middle-voice rest as a melodic continuation of the rising line. This cadential close is not structurally decisive as the harmonic progression coincides with the first melodic phrase built by the motif, its two sequences, and a concluding note. Moreover, neither of the other two voices has yet taken part in the polyphonic display of material, nor has the bass even begun to participate in any development. The first structural caesura appears at the subsequent perfect cadential close. As the frequent E<sup>#</sup>s from m. 3 onward indicate, the prelude modulates to its dominant F<sup>#</sup> major, where the progression concludes at m. 6<sub>1</sub>. This cadential close is firmly established in mm. 5-6 with a cadential-bass pattern (ii-V-I) and a melodic do-si-do formula. Similar cadential features mark the next structural break, which occurs, after a modulation to the tonic relative (G<sup>#</sup> minor), in the middle of m. 10, as well as the return to the tonic in m. 15. (The bass patterns in m. 4: C<sup>#</sup>-F<sup>#</sup>-B and in m. 13: F<sup>#</sup>-B-E, both appearing to support V/V-V-I progressions, are not conclusive since the upper voice remains unresolved in each case.)

The prelude thus comprises three sections and a short coda.

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|------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| I    | mm. 1-6 <sub>1</sub>                 | tonic to dominant            |
| II   | mm. 6-10 <sub>3</sub>                | dominant to tonic relative   |
| III  | mm. 10 <sub>3</sub> -15 <sub>1</sub> | tonic relative back to tonic |
| coda | mm. 15-19                            | confirmation of tonic        |

There is only one short structural analogy: mm. 4-6<sub>1</sub> correspond with mm. 13-15<sub>1</sub>. Both include the above-mentioned melodically thwarted cadential closes (in B and E major respectively, tonic and subdominant) followed by full cadential closes in F<sup>#</sup> and B major, dominant and tonic.

The prelude's basic character is lively, owing both to the ornamental character of the principal motif and to the very even overall rhythmic pattern. The tempo allows for a brisk pace in the quarter-notes. The 16th-notes should sound ornamental, i.e., without emphasis on each single note, but by no means hasty. The articulation includes legato for the 16th-notes and non legato for all other note values. In detail: a gentler, dynamically shaped detached style in the melodic quarter-notes (mm. 1 and 6) and equally melodic eighth-notes (mm. 5 and 10<sub>3</sub>-12) should be distinguished from a more neutral non legato touch in the cadential-bass patterns in quarter-notes (mm. 3-4, 5-6, 13, 14-15, 18-19) and eighth-notes (m. 10). Longer note values that demand absolute legato appear in the do-si-do formulas (see U: mm. 5<sub>2</sub>-6<sub>1</sub>: F#-E#-F# and 18<sub>4</sub>-19<sub>3</sub>: B-A#-B, M: mm. 9<sub>4</sub>-10<sub>3</sub>: G#-F\*-G#, and even the truncated one in U: mm. 14<sub>2</sub>-14<sub>4</sub>: B-A#-rest).

The question whether or not phrasing before or after the principal motif should be expressed by a slight cut in the sound flow arises mainly in two cases: if the motif's after-beat beginning is preceded by an on-beat note belonging to a melodic line (as in L: m. 4<sub>3</sub> and M: m. 5<sub>3</sub>) and if the principal motif, originally only seven 16th-notes long and omitting the strong beats, is extended to include a final on-beat note before it is sequenced (as in L: m. 6<sub>3</sub> and U: m. 7<sub>3</sub>). Stark leaps between notes are certainly inappropriate in this piece, but for performers with good skills in subtle articulation, slight interruptions constitute a more plausible solution than simple legato continuation.

The principal motif consists of seven 16th-notes circling around a central pitch (B in the first half of m. 1, etc.). The circling motion resembles an inverted turn and is followed by a repetition of the three rising notes, thus ending one note above its center. Harmonically, this ascent is already established in the middle of the motif, on beat 2, since the step to the higher pitch, accompanied by a step upward in the middle voice, represents a progression also on the harmonic level. The motif is thus not just "self-centered" but comprises an active step. In terms of melodic tension, this active step is expressed in a delicate crescendo through the initial notes up to the middle—the note that is also metrically the strongest in this group. The three notes completing the motif provide the complementing diminuendo, so that the end is as soft as the beginning. Delineating the motif's tension-curve clearly is essential as it otherwise risks coming out as mere finger work due to its short duration in relatively fast tempo. Moreover, the strong-beat 16th-note Bach later occasionally adds traps performers into an awkward accent on this extra note, thus distorting the motif's original shape. Apart from this passive extension, the

principal motif undergoes only two modifications. Four times, a slight change in one of the intervals (see U: mm. 2<sub>2</sub> and 12<sub>2</sub> as well as L: mm. 5<sub>1</sub> and 14<sub>1</sub>) eliminates the ascent characterizing the original shape. Moreover, inversions convey a resolving tendency. They are almost exclusively found in the coda (six times in mm. 15-18, only once already in m. 12).

The principal motif is complemented by two memorable note-groups that recur and thereby form part of the thematic material. One is the ascent in quarter-notes introduced in M: m. 1. It describes a gentle dynamic rise that strings the principal motif together in one overall direction. This quarter-note motif recurs in the first measure of section II (M: m. 6) and in double notes in the coda (m. 17). The other secondary motif graces only section III. It moves primarily in eighth-notes (the three motifs thus each favor a different note value) and is conceived as a question + answer pattern of the outer voices (mm. 10-11, U: D<sup>#</sup>-G<sup>#</sup>-F<sup>#</sup>-E<sup>#</sup> and L: C<sup>#</sup>-B-A-G<sup>#</sup>-F<sup>#</sup>; sequenced in the subsequent measures). One very convincing way of molding this motif pair is to choose complementing dynamics for the complementing segments: crescendo for the upper-voice “question” and diminuendo for the lower-voice “answer.”

The development of tension in each of the sections is fairly straightforward as it largely follows the overall pitch outline. In section I, an initial increase of tension (mm. 1-2<sub>3</sub>) is followed by a long decrease (mm. 2<sub>3</sub>-6). In section II, proportions are reversed with a much more extended increase (mm. 6-9<sub>3</sub>) and a short relaxation (mm. 9<sub>3</sub>-10<sub>3</sub>). Section III begins in the minor mode and with a new motif—both reasons to create some color contrast (mm. 10<sub>3</sub>-12<sub>3</sub>), followed then by a long decrease that corresponds to that of the first section (mm. 12<sub>3</sub>-15<sub>1</sub>). In the coda, the tendency to relax is thwarted by three features: the replacement of the principal motif by a figure with an ascending-scale component (m. 15<sub>3</sub>-16<sub>1</sub>), the denser texture after the upper voice has split, and the recurrence of the ascending quarter-note motif, now in double thirds. The prelude thus ends in an assertive mood.

## **WTC I/23 in B major – Fugue**

The subject of the B-major fugue is two measures long. It begins after an initial eighth-note rest with a long upbeat and ends after an ornamented C<sup>#</sup>, the representative of the dominant harmony, with a return to the keynote on the downbeat of m. 3.

The pitch pattern consists almost exclusively of seconds, interrupted only for the interval C $\sharp$ –F $\sharp$ . This leap of a perfect fifth is not of expressive quality, and thus does not entirely match the mood of the stepwise motion around it. Closer inspection of the subject's pitch pattern provides an explanation: the fifth represents a change in pitch level rather than an interval in a continuing line. The initial ascent, launched from the keynote, breaks off with a quarter-note on the first strong beat, only to start afresh from the lower F $\sharp$  and climb even higher. The subject thus consists of two subphrases that relate to one another in such a way that the first appears as an abandoned attempt of what the second then completes in a more powerful format. A look at the rhythmic design confirms this assumption. Considering that the longest note value, the half-note C $\sharp$ , is ornamented by a trill and thus sounds very animated, the quarter-note C $\sharp$  does in fact constitute the most powerful rhythmic interruption, marking the point where the regular motion comes to a halt before a fresh start.

The subject's harmonic background is difficult to determine as Bach harmonizes it differently in almost every statement. It seems safe to claim, however, that there is a twofold progression, with an interrupted cadence



either on the downbeat of the second subject measure (as, e.g., in m. 6) or slightly later (as, e.g., in m. 30), and the perfect cadence taking place in the two final notes.

In a subject with two subphrases one must obviously expect two climaxes. As it was already established that the second subphrase completes the aborted efforts of the first, the balance between the two subphrases does not require further decisions. The first climax is easy to determine since the fourth note C $\sharp$  is supported by the melodic rise from an ornamented B, the harmonic movement from the tonic to the dominant, the rhythmic value of a quarter-note, and the metric position on a (relatively strong) middle beat. Determining the climax of the second subphrase is not quite as easy. The contour reaches its peak on E, a note that is neither harmonically nor rhythmically or metrically supported. By contrast, the ornamented C $\sharp$  represents two important steps of the cadence, apart from being in a rhythmically and metrically stronger position than the off-beat eighth-note E. As a result, a climax on E will give the subject (and, with it, the entire fugue) a more virtuoso touch by stressing a superficial feature (a high note), while a climax on the trilled C $\sharp$  gives the subject more depth by emphasizing its structural traits.

The fugue comprises twelve subject statements:

1. mm. 1-3	T	7. mm. 18-20	S <sub>inv</sub>
2. mm. 3-5	A	8. mm. 20-22	A <sub>inv</sub>
3. mm. 5-7	S	9. mm. 21-23	B
4. mm. 7-9	B	10. mm. 24-26	T
5. mm. 11-13	T	11. mm. 29-31	A
6. mm. 16-18	A	12. mm. 31-33	S



In the course of the fugue, the subject undergoes two kinds of modifications, one at the beginning and the other at the end. The initial intervals of both subphrases are enlarged from seconds to thirds in all tonal answers (mm. 3, 7, 31). In the inverted answer, only the opening step of the first subphrase is enlarged (m. 20). The final resolution is delayed (mm. 7, 31), diverted (mm. 18, 20), or omitted (m. 22). In one instance, the subject ending is varied but arrives in time at the proper resolution (m. 26). In other words, only four entries are quite “original”: nos. 1, 5, 9, and 12.

Parallel statements do not occur; nor do true strettos in which a substantial segment of one subject entry overlaps with another. The only instance where an entry begins at less than two bars’ distance from the beginning of the previous one occurs in m. 21, i.e., in connection with the one entry in the fugue that omits the final resolution. Thus the process one is hears—as opposed to what one sees in the score—can be said to be concluded by the time the subsequent statement enters.

Bach invents one counter-subject for this fugue. It is introduced against the subject answer in mm. 3-5. Beginning two eighth-notes later than the subject, the counter-subject also displays two subphrases separated by a change in pitch level (see m. 3<sub>4</sub>). The phrasing occurs one eighth-note after that in the subject. Moreover, in its first appearance the counter-subject even ends with a metrically delayed resolution, i.e., one eighth-note after the subject (m. 5<sub>1</sub> E-D#). Besides this similarity in phrase structure, the counter-subject is also related to the subject in its pitch pattern as it shows an overwhelming participation of seconds and a scalar ascent in the second subphrase. Its dynamic



independence, too, is limited. Neither performers who outline the descent in the first subphrase with a diminuendo, thus continuing the tension decline across the cut between the subject's two subphrases, nor performers who express an active gesture in a downward crescendo, thus imitating that in the subject's first subphrase, will achieve much individuality, for in the second subphrase, both pitch and rhythm favor the syncopated highest note—with the result that this climax very nearly coincides with that of the subject. To conclude: there is in this fugue little challenge for the subject. Moreover, the counter-subject is not a very faithful companion. In its complete range it recurs only three times (see A: mm. 5-7, S: mm. 7-9, and A: mm. 31-33). In addition, the second subphrase appears once without the first (see A: mm. 12-13), as does an even more truncated second half of the second subphrase (see S: m. 17).

The fugue comprises five subject-free passages.

E1	mm. 9-11 <sub>3</sub>	E3	mm. 23 <sub>3</sub> -24 <sub>1</sub>
E2	mm. 13 <sub>3</sub> -16 <sub>1</sub>	E4	mm. 26-29 <sub>1</sub>
		E5	mm. 33-34

The first episode introduces the listener to several motifs that must be regarded as genuine episode motifs as they are unrelated to both subject and counter-subject. Closer inspection reveals that they all derive from a single common source. The different versions share the shape of a concave curve in which the longest note, providing both the harmonic and the dynamic climax, falls on the lowest pitch. The example below shows three versions of this motif, all found in mm. 9<sub>1</sub>-11<sub>1</sub>, 13<sub>3</sub>-15<sub>3</sub>, and 26<sub>1</sub>-28<sub>1</sub>:



In the three more substantial episodes, M1 invariably provides the opening. In each case, it is accompanied by M1a in such a way that the two run in parallel thirds or sixths throughout their “tail.” Also in each of the three cases, M1 is sequenced by the variation M1b, which is then followed by an extra “tail.” Before this sequence and in stretto with the original M1, there appears a variation in which the quarter-note is replaced by two eighth-notes in octave displacement. (In E2 m. 14, this octave leap even involves a swap of voices from tenor to bass.) All three episodes then end with separated “tails” and “heads” of the motif. Both the short E3 and the final E5 only feature the “head” of M1b (see B: mm. 23-24, and T: mm. 33-34). In the former, the two upper voices continue with sequence and

imitation drawn from the soprano's fragmentary counter-subject figure, so that this episode appears more like an extension of the preceding subject entry, serving, one might say, to re-establish the subject's original metric position after the premature entry of the tenor in m. 21.

As regards the relationship between the episodes in this fugue, there is a notable analogy between E1, E2, and E4. The remaining two episodes, while both featuring the same segment from the motif's variation, fulfill structurally different purposes and should therefore not be interpreted as related. The motivically determined episodes bring about a significant color contrast to the subject statements. Each begin with a slight diminuendo in the descending sequence of M1b and end in a gentle crescendo in the ascending sequences of the "head." By contrast, the two shorter episodes are integrated into the level of the primary material—one bridging between two subject statements, the other providing the final relaxation, but both without much dynamic development of their own.

The predominance of stepwise motion, coupled with the variety of note values, determines this fugue as a piece in rather calm basic character. The pace is serene but not hesitant. The tempo proportion between the prelude and the fugue had best be complex, owing to the fact that both pieces are in common time and based on the same note values. A simple proportion would thus create an effect of dullness in the succession of the two pieces. What works well is a rendition in which three quarter-notes in the prelude correspond with two quarter-notes in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: prelude beats = 108, fugue beats = 72.) The overall articulation is legato. (Exceptions occur in the cadential-bass patterns of mm. 13, 17-18, and 33-34, as well as in other consecutive quarter-note or eighth-note leaps, e.g., m. 24: B, m. 31-32: T.)

The trill in the subject poses some problems. It is an integral part of the thematic phrase—so much so that playing the half-note without an ornament would sound extremely dry.<sup>1</sup> As the trill is approached in stepwise motion, it begins on the main note. As the fastest note values in this piece are 16th-notes, it shakes in 32nd-notes. And as its resolution appears—so far as it appears at all—on one of the two strong beats in the reigning 4/4 time, it must end with a suffix. This long trill thus contains altogether fifteen notes, to be played very regularly and, what is even more

<sup>1</sup>This is certainly the impression we get when we play the voice alone. It is also what any string or wind player, performing this fugue in a quartet, would feel. Only pianists, busy with figures in other parts but still in their own ten fingers, occasionally ignore the single-voice demands, with the excuse that "there is already enough happening at this point."





When trying to determine how this fugue is structured, one cannot rely on any of the data that normally guide such an analysis. Except for the final measure, there are no explicit cadential formulas outside the confines of the subject statements. The only obvious cadential-bass patterns mark the endings of the fifth and sixth statements respectively. They thus follow one another too closely to indicate section endings. The texture is unusual insofar as only two among the twelve subject statements sound in full ensemble. All other entries either feature one resting voice or maintain the full four-part texture only for a short span. The harmonic design, too, is atypical insofar as no noteworthy modulation takes. Except for one entry in the subdominant, the statements alternate regularly between the tonic and the dominant positions of the home key.

The only clues to determine the structural layout of the composition are thus the analogies observed earlier in the design of the episodes. These analogies can now be expanded:

4 consecutive subject statements (mm. 1-9)	≈	4 consecutive subject statements (mm. 18-26) (E3 regarded as an extension)
E1 (mm. 9-11)	≈	E4 (mm. 26-29)
2 additional statements interrupted by E2	≈	2 additional statements rounded off by E5

As both the fourth statement in m. 9 and its counterpart in m. 26 close with a perfect cadence while the ensuing episodes feature open endings leading into the entry following next, we may assume that these episodes open sections rather than close them, as in so many other fugues. The result of these comparisons leaves us with four sections, of which

- the first and third each consist of four consecutive subject statements and end in a perfect cadence (m. 9: F# major, m. 26: C# major),
- the second and fourth each show an opening episode of analogous material and design, two subject statements, and another episode (incorporated into the second section but closing the fourth).

Concerning the dynamic design valid in the sections of this fugue, two basically different patterns can be distinguished. The first and third sections consist exclusively of subject statements. Within the first section, the tension rises gradually along with the usual increase in the number of voices. Owing to the fact, already mentioned above, that this section does not truly establish the expected four-part texture, the growth should be restrained in such a way as to avoid the sensation of a powerful climax. In the third section, the two initial statements appear in inversion. Given the particular shape of this subject with its two rising motions now converted to falling

lines, the inversions sound much less cogent and self-confident than the original. As a result, the four entries of this section also give the impression of curbed tension.

The second and fourth sections feature alternations of episodes and subject statements. The decisive musical message in these sections is that of color contrast. A very light and delicate touch in the episodes, conveying both a playful character and melodic openness, is set against a much more assertive touch in the subject statements. In contrast to the episodes, the statements are clearly directed toward their goal and assuredly closing. Performers who wish to weigh the two entries in each section against each other will find that in the fourth section, the final statement surpasses the preceding one, both because of the rise in these consecutive entries from the alto to the soprano and because of the temporary four-part texture. In the second section, however, where the statements are separated by a substantial episode, the question of any dynamic relation between the statements seems beside the point.

