WTC II/3 in C♯ major – Prelude

The prelude in C♯ major is the only one in the second book of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* to appear as "two in one": It comprises two clearly designated sections contrasting in every respect: in meter, rhythmic features, melodic relevance, and texture. The tempo indication in m. 25 recalls the C-minor prelude of Book I, while the sequence prelude / fugato / fugue is reminiscent of the prelude in E♭ also from the first volume—with the difference that there, the threefold form took place within the confines of the prelude itself whereas here, it involves the fugue proper.

The regularity of the rhythmic features within the first twenty-four measures defines the "prelude"-portion as harmonically determined. The apparent four-part texture hardly disguises an underlying chordal structure. In terms of measure numbers, the change to a faster tempo and triple meter occurs almost exactly in the middle of the piece. In terms of actual playing time, however, the proportion between the two structural halves is quite different, with the *Allegro* taking up little more than one fourth of the duration of the "prelude within the prelude." Yet the fugato achieves musical balance through the intensity of its polyphonic design.

The prelude's first harmonic progression, extending over a tonic pedal, closes at the end of m. 3 where the C♯-major harmony is regained. The following three measures provide a modulation to G♯ major, the dominant, which is reached at the end of m. 6. The third harmonic progression is longer and more complex, passing through several secondary keys before resolving finally into the subdominant F♯ major at the end of m. 13. The fourth harmonic section is the most vivid and deserves closer inspection later. Suffice it here to mention that it consists of a series of dominant-seventh chords all deceived in their resolution. These four measures lead into a transposition of the second progression (mm. 18-20 ≈ 4-6), which brings the return to the tonic. While this may give a sense of closure, there is a fifth progression that leaves C♯ major once again to turn to the dominant, from where the fugato is then launched.

The fugato follows with three further harmonic progressions that do not, however, make any attempt to leave the area of tonic and dominant. The very pronounced closing formula in mm. 33-34 marks the return to the tonic. A weaker cadential formula turns once more to the dominant in

m. 41_1, and the final ten measures confirm the tonic with voice-splitting to a four-part chord in m. 50. Here is an overview of the layout:

"Prelude"			
I	mm. 1-3	I	(C♯ major)
II	mm. 4-6	I - V	(modulation to G♯ major)
III	mm. 7-13	V-ii-vi-I-IV	(modulation to F♯ major)
IV	mm. 14-20	IV - I	(return to C♯ major)
V	mm. 21-25_1	I - V	(modulation to G♯ major)
"Fugato"			
VI	mm. 25-34_1	V - I	(return to C♯ major)
VII	mm. 34-41_1	I - V	(modulation to G♯ major)
VIII	mm. 41-50	V - I	(final return to C♯ major)

The challenge posed by this piece is to create the greatest possible difference between the two halves—while at the same time conveying the message that they belong integrally together.

Difference in character is achieved mainly by variations in touch and intensity: In the "prelude," no note, whether of 16th-, eighth-, or quarter-note duration, should stand out from the chordal texture of which it is but a part. Dynamically this means that any small-scale increase, any accented or agogically delayed stroke automatically sounds like a pretense of melodic independence, which is not what is wanted here. (In order to create this non-melodic effect, performers might even strive to counteract natural tendencies and play the soprano-ascent at the beginning of each half measure with an imperceptible decrease.) In addition to such dynamic treatment of note-groups, the intensity in each single note should be kept very low. This is obtained by a combination of neutrally colored touch and very even articulation. While the connection between the 16th-notes is definitely legato and should not pose a problem, an even articulation in the eighth-notes is less easy to achieve and needs more attention than pianists are often willing to pay in the case of such secondary features. The choice is between, on the one hand, legato (which means finger-legato in note repetitions) and, on the other hand, a very gentle non legato (in which skips are no more separated than steps).

In the "fugato," the opposite holds true: the texture consists of nothing but melodic features. Every note is alive in color and touch, and every line is dynamically shaped. Articulation, too, is different: the legato in the 16th-notes is lighter than that in the "prelude"; unmarked eighth-notes are well detached, and the wedge-carrying eighth-notes in the "fugato"-motif (as well as in all further entries where this is not specifically indicated) sound staccato. Unity between the two unequal halves is achieved by

means of tempo proportion: one beat (a quarter-note) in the "prelude" corresponds with a whole measure (a dotted quarter-note) in the "fugato."

Ornaments appear only in the "fugato." One is the inverted mordent in m. 28. It is played with the regular F♯ as the lower neighboring note. In the imitation, the inverted mordent also uses the whole tone D♯-C♯-D♯. Despite the rule that thematic ornaments are to be transferred to further entries, and the fact that the "fugato" motif recurs several times, such transferals do not take place in this piece. They are hampered either by the simultaneous use of the originally ornamented note in a cadential bass pattern (as in mm. 33 and 40) or by a varied ending of the motif (as in mm. 44 and 45). Another ornament in this "fugato" is the cadential trill in m. 33. As its resolution, C♯, is anticipated on the 16th-note before the strong beat, this ornament is a point d'arrêt trill: it ends without a suffix, stopping short on (or preferably immediately before) the beat preceding the anticipation. In this case a possible realization consists of four 32nd-notes of which the last is tied over to the third eighth-note beat. This ornament, too, remains singular. Finally, there is the grace-note preceding the first downbeat in the "fugato" motif. As an appoggiatura it enhances the motif's climax. It is indicated in U: mm. 26 and M: m 27 but can be played equally effectively in L: m. 31. Its note-value allows for two solutions. According to the rule of rhythmic splitting in dotted values, an eighth-note appoggiatura followed by a quarter-note resolution is perfectly acceptable. Thinking, however, of the usage to let sustained note-values in imitative texture disappear as early as possible so as to direct the listeners' ears toward the newly entering voice, a realization with an appoggiatura of only 16th-note duration also finds support. In this second case, transferal of the ornament beyond the first round of entries is not possible since all further statements of the motif are accompanied by 16th-note lines. An eighth-note appoggiatura does not cause harmonic clashes in later entries but may sound somewhat odd; it is definitely excluded in m. 38 where it would lead to hidden octave parallels.

The first two harmonic progressions within the "prelude" describe simple and very smooth dynamic curves, with the climax on the respective subdominant chords (i.e., the downbeats of mm. 2 and 5 respectively). As the second progression contains an active modulation, its dynamic increase may be slighter more pronounced than that in the first progression.

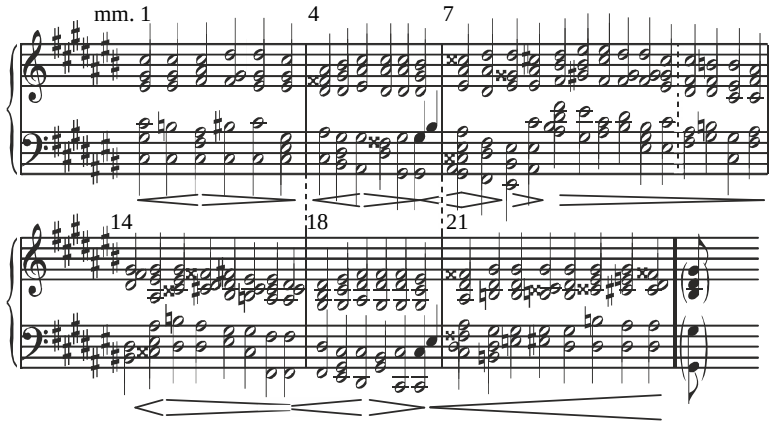
The final measure of the second progression features in mm. 6-7 and 8-9 a tentative melodic emancipation of the tenor. This melodic sequence, apart from highlighting the relationship between the measures, remains a transitory secondary feature. Harmonically, the progression moves swiftly

through various modulations, reaching on its way steps ii (D♯ minor in m. 7_3) and vi (A♯ minor in m. 8_3). The dynamic equivalent demands an initial increase that is slightly stronger than any previous one (toward m. 7_1) followed by an incomplete release from this V^7 toward the inverted D♯ minor chord (m. 7_3), and a weaker increase toward the next V^7 (m. 8_1) followed by a more definite release to the target chord A♯ minor (m. 8_3). The melodic sequence in the tenor, beginning on the fourth beat of this measure, engineers another increase that now launches a very gradual protracted relaxation, up to the resolution into F♯ major in m. 13_3.

The fourth progression consists of two curves. The first is launched by the most powerful dynamic increase in the "prelude," triggered by the unexpected harmonic turn in m. 14. It is complemented by an almost reluctant and very gradual decrease through a series of "wrong resolutions" and ends unresolved (both in terms of harmony and of dynamic tension) in m. 17.[1] The second curve, once again a regular and complete cadential progression, begins with a slight increase toward the subdominant (here: its representative ii^7, see m. 19_1) from where the tension falls to a complete release in the return to the tonic (m. 20_3).

The final progression within the "prelude" could be played in various ways. Most convincing, in view of the unity between the two halves of this composition, is to render this renewed modulation to the dominant as a long crescendo, so as to arrive at the "fugato" in a tone quality distinctly different from (i.e., more intense than) that in the "prelude" but not jarring with the earlier color as would be the case with an abrupt contrast. The diagram below aims to provide a visual suggestion of the relationship between the harmonic developments and the dynamic shading in the "prelude" within the prelude.

[1]Apropos "wrong resolutions": The harmonic progression here is most bizarre: m. 14 begins with a G♯-major seventh chord that creates an expectation for C♯ major, but is followed instead by an A♯-major seventh chord! The latter generates a longing for D♯—which is reached only in the bass, while the other voices prolong the dominant-seventh. The delayed resolution is once again not satisfactory: in m. 15_3, D♯ is reached but as before in the form of a dominant-seventh chord. In the same way, the resolution of this chord appears as a G♯-major seventh (m. 16_1), and its resolution is another dominant-seventh chord (on C♯, see m. 16_3). The consequent F♯ major chord in m. 17_1 comes with a major seventh—thus not as a dominant but as a tonic with a leading-note that one expects to hear resolved in the second half of the measure. Yet, instead of granting this melodic release, which now seems so close at hand, Bach leads the soprano downward, thus creating what turns out to be the subdominant-six-five of C♯ major. At this point of what could be called harmonic frustration, the listener thus comes to understand that no repetition of the F♯ major cadence was intended, but just a delay of the return to the home key.



In the "fugato," the motivic beginning with a 4/16 upbeat suggests an increase toward m. 26_1, a note additionally enhanced by an appoggiatura. A complementing decrease is thwarted by the absence of the expected leading-note F𝄪 (are we in G♯ major or still in C♯?), the energy of the two staccato eighth-notes, and the rhythmic accent of the final syncopation, which is intensified by an ornament. There is thus no dynamic relaxation.

The motif's initial entry is answered in fugal style by imitations on the fifth (M) and the octave (L), before a half-measure closing formula concludes the section. Section II begins with two inverted and varied entries (L: mm. 34-37_1, U: mm. 35-38_1). A statement in the original shape (L: mm. 37-40), an incomplete inverted entry (U: mm. 38-39), and another brief cadential formula follow. The final section features two entries of the motif (M: mm. 41- 45_1, U: mm. 42-45) above ornamental runs (L). The cadential close is extended to allow for a dynamic relaxation. The piece ends in a color almost as soft, though not quite as pale, as it had begun.

WTC II/3 in C♯ major – Fugue

The subject of this fugue combines so many unusual features that it is worth listing them before addressing the details. With just six notes spanning the length of one measure (from the second eighth-note of m. 1 to m. 2_1), this subject is one of the shortest in the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.[2] If brevity

[2]The subject of the C♯-minor fugue in vol. I has only five notes, but these expand over more than three measures in fairly calm tempo. The subject of the E-major fugue from vol. I is slightly shorter than this one and also fast-paced but rhythmically far more exciting.

and simplicity seem noteworthy, even more surprising is that this brief unit appears in stretto from its very first appearance. Listeners will necessarily assume an even shorter subject, one comprising only the four notes that sound unaccompanied before the second entry. Although the harmonic layout proves that this segment is insufficient for a subject, Bach seems to take the foreseeable misunderstanding into account when he uses this four-note fragment several times later in the fugue to replace the entire subject (see particularly in mm. 25-35). If the early entry of the second subject statement takes listeners by surprise, they must be all the more astonished to hear that the third entry (M: mm. 2-3) already uses the inversion. Moreover, almost every subject statement is followed by a motif that, serving as a regular extension to the entry in the particular section of the fugue, is imitated in all voices. These motifs, which often sound against a subsequent subject entry but are actually designed as strung behind the preceding one, confound listeners' expectations for a counter-subject.

Let us now look into details. The pitch pattern comprises a broken chord followed by a short stepwise descent (C♯ E C♯ G♯ F♯ E). The steps of this descent are interrupted by rests; hence the overall effect of a melodic line in separated notes. The rhythm is simple, comprising only eighth-note values. Rhythmic variety is provided in the course of the fugue by the regular motifs, which introduce 16th-notes, 32nd-notes, and tied notes. The subject's harmonic background is as simple as its melodic line. Owing to the stretto overlap, only the minimal i-V-i materializes: the three initial eighth-notes represent the tonic; the remaining three notes stand for the dominant, the dominant-seventh, and the final return to the tonic. The dynamic follows this simple design. The climax falls on G♯ as it represents at the same time the middle of the subject, the onset of the only non-tonic harmony, and the target of the largest leap.

When listing the subject entries of this fugue, one can adopt different views: Counting only the twelve entries that quote the subject in its full length—these will be listed below in bold face—is not good enough for a structural explanation as it leaves the fugue's second half devoid of its subject. Statements that, although reduced to their incomplete four-note scope, retain the original rhythm (or its augmentation or diminution) must therefore be included; these are given below in Roman characters printed in normal, widened, or narrowed typeface. Inversions are indicated by an asterisk. Not included among subject statements are figures that resemble the abridged subject but are falsified in meter or interval pattern, either because their climax falls on a weak beat or because their contour is not launched with the characteristic third. This still leaves 34 statements:

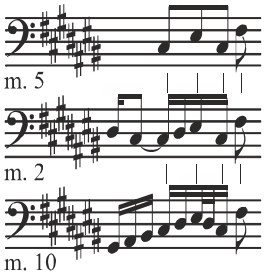
1	**mm.**	**1-2**	**L**	**11**	**mm.**	**7-8**	**L**	**21**	**mm.**	**14-15**	**L**
2	**mm.**	**1-2**	**U**	**12**	**mm.**	**7-8**	**M**	**22**	**mm.**	**15-16**	**M**
3	**mm.**	**2-3**	**M***	**13**	**mm.**	**8-9**	**U**	**23**	**mm.**	**15-16**	**U***
4	m.	3	L	14	m.	9	L	24	m.	17	L
5	**mm.**	**4-5**	**U**	15	mm.	9-10	M	25	mm.	18-19	M*
6	**mm.**	**4-5**	**M**	16	mm.	9-10	U	26	m.	19	L*
7	**mm.**	**5-6**	**L**	17	mm.	10-11	L*	27	mm.	19-20	L
8	m.	5	U	18	m.	11	U*	28	m.	24	L
9	mm.	5-6	M	19	m.	11	M	29	m.	25	U*
10	m.	6	L*	20	mm.	11-12	L	30	mm.	25-26	M
								31	mm.	25-26	L
								32	mm.	27-28	L
								33	mm.	28-29	U
								34	mm.	31-32	L

This table demonstrates a number of facts:

- There are four blocks of full-length entries, each comprising three statements (mm. 1-3: L U M, mm. 4-6: U M L, mm. 7-9: L M U, and 14-16: L M U).
- The second half of the fugue does not feature a single full-length entry. These only occur in the first sixteen of altogether thirty-five measures.
- Incomplete entries in original rhythm also form four regular blocks (mm. 9-10: L M U, mm. 10-12: L U M L, mm. 25-26: U M L, and mm. 27-29: L U).
- Further regular groups are built by the diminished entries (mm. 5-6: U M L and mm. 18-20: M L L).
- Four shortened subject statements seem outside the groups; interestingly, all of them are in the lower voice (mm. 3, 17, 24, and 31-32).

As was already mentioned earlier, the initial subject entry in the lower voice is followed by a melodic unit that recurs several times in the course of the fugue (see L: m. 2 D♯-C♯—D♯-E♯-C♯-F♯). It sounds against another subject statement and could thus be heard as a counter-subject. Yet this seems not to be the chief purpose of this motif, as it is conceived as an extension to an entry. This is obvious in the many cases where it occurs only after but not against a subject statement (e.g., U: mm. 2-3, M: m. 16, and U: m. 16-17). The same is true for the extension introduced in m. 8 (see L: B♯ to F♯). It, too, appears always strung after a subject entry, and

recurs as such—with slight variations—quite frequently in the course of the fugue. We had therefore better abandon the concept of counter-subjects for this fugue and speak of motifs. As these motifs partake consistently in the imitation process, it would also be counter-productive to consider them purely as secondary material. This becomes all the more obvious as we discover that both of them are elaborate variations of the incomplete subject itself: compare the interval structure in the motifs with that in the four-note answer. Moreover, since the line is blurred in this fugue between measures determined by subject statements and subject-free passages, it seems advisable to forego any attempt to distinguish episodes, and to describe the process of material development chronologically rather than systematically.



The tempo in this fugue may not be too fast, so that it can convincingly accommodate the tied 16th-notes as well as the 32nd-note runs at the end of the piece. The relative tempo of the prelude to the fugue should be chosen in logical progression from one pace to the next: a quarter-note in the "prelude" corresponds with a whole measure in the *Allegro*, while an eighth-note in the *Allegro* corresponds with an eighth-note in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: prelude beats = 64, *Allegro* whole measure = 64, fugue beats = 96.)

As ambiguous as the fugue's material is its basic character, since the complex rhythmic pattern and the ubiquitous broken-chord figures seem to point in opposite directions. Yet the conclusion drawn from the rhythmic features—that the basic tempo is rather calm—is supported by a detail inherent in the subject itself. The rests between the descending notes reveal this clearly. Had Bach conceived the character of this piece as lively, then the rests would have been unnecessary, for the three notes, if written as quarter-notes, would have been played non legato anyway. It is only in calm basic character that they would be rendered legato and need rests to indicate the desired separation. For the articulation of most of the notes in this fugue, however, the distinction between lively and calm character has no relevance. We are dealing here almost exclusively with two features: eighth-notes in patterns of leaps (which would be played non legato in either character), and shorter notes in stepwise patterns (which would be played legato in either character). The distinction between the two characters only has implications for the longer note values in stepwise motion—above all, the descending syncopations in mm. 30-31: U.

The following table describes the events of this fugue in chronological order. Roman numbers (designating the beginning of a new section in a traditional analysis) indicate that a harmonic conclusion coincides with features suggesting a new beginning, like a reduced ensemble, a new stretto, etc. Owing to the overwhelming use of strettos, traditional criteria for counting subject entries in a section must be disregarded here.

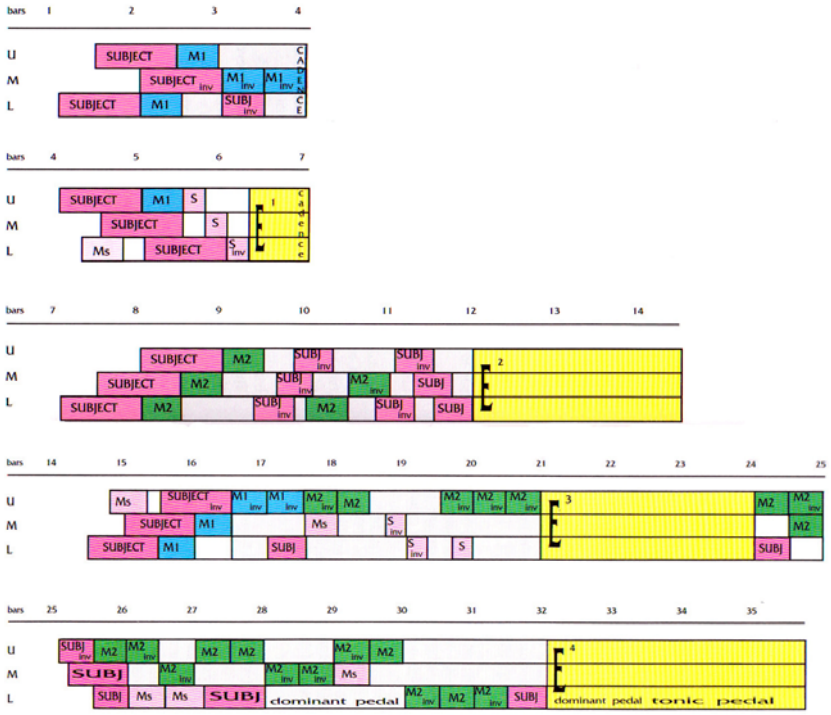
I mm. 1-4_1: Stretto of three complete subject statements (the third of them inverted), followed by four statements of M1, whereby the M1 imitation in the middle voice is met by an incomplete inverted subject statement in the lower voice. Cadential close in the tonic with do–si–(omitted)–do formula.

II mm. 4-7_1: Stretto of three complete subject statements (the third of them slightly shortened), with extra density achieved by a false entry (Ms) in the lower voice. Followed by M1 in the leading voice and three incomplete subject statements in diminution (the third of them inverted). Cadential close onto the dominant, once again with incomplete resolution as the target note in the bass is omitted.

III mm. 7-14_3: Stretto of three complete subject statements, each of them followed first by M2 and then by an incomplete inverted entry. Complemented by two further statements of M2 (L original, M inverted) followed by four incomplete subject entries (L + U inverted, M + L original). Descending sequences in all three voices leading to an imperfect cadence (E♯ major = V/vi).

IV mm. 14_3-25: Stretto of three complete subject statements (the third of them inverted), condensed with a false entry (Ms) as in section II, followed first by four statements of M1 (L + M original, U inverted + sequenced) and then by two statements of M2 (the first of them inverted), met by an incomplete subject statement in the lower voice plus a variant of the false entry (Ms). Complemented by three diminished subject entries as well as a variant of M2 with two sequences. Descending sequences. Cadential pattern toward the subdominant with denied resolution in the upper voice. Ascending sequences with three entries of Ms in the lower voice and incomplete entry in the bass met by threefold M2 quotation.

V mm. 25-35: Densest stretto in this fugue, all statements incomplete, the first inverted, the second augmented, surrounded by M2 and Ms. Followed by nine M2 imitations and sequences with a new augmented entry. Emergence of a much varied dominant pedal that defines the music up to the onset of the tonic pedal in the final measures.



The rise and fall of tension in this fugue describes a regular pattern. Each section begins with fairly high intensity. The intensity is slightly higher in the second and fourth sections than in the third because of the additional false entry with Ms, and higher even in section V because of the particular density and the augmented statement. In each section, the tension then decreases. In section I tension declines sharply after the stretto, in section II it subsides gradually through the diminished entries, and in section III it abates even more gently through two strettos with incomplete entries. In sections IV and V the decrease in tension seems to follow that in section I, but is then prolonged by an extended stretch in moderate intensity. Sections II and III end in fairly soft tones, while sections I and IV present material up to the very end and thus do not create so much relaxation. Only the extended cadential close in section V provides a complete release.