

WTC II/5 in D major – Prelude

On the surface, this prelude appears like a polyphonic composition, yet there are several passages that, like the opening, are distinctly homophonic in texture. Further observations do not immediately clear these doubts. On the one hand, we find consistent writing in three parts, abandoned only for rare instances of voice splitting. Moreover, most compositional techniques expected in polyphonic works—imitation and instances of contrapuntal setting, sequencing and inversion of motifs, as well as motivic development—are employed. On the other hand, close inspection reveals that many of the measures that at first glance seem to feature independent voices actually represent homophony in disguise: only one voice is melodically active while the others describe either ornamented parallels or rhythmically embellished accompaniment figures.

This ambivalence of polyphonic and homophonic elements continues in the choice of the thematic material and in the structural design. The ubiquitous presence of a single motif recalls the design of inventions, whereas the distinctive coloring of the segments within this motif and their use in separate sections of the prelude, together with the ternary layout of the work and its harmonic development, suggest a classical form.

The prelude's main motif ends with the essential steps of a cadence. Yet since regular participation of all voices is postponed for four measures, the harmonic closures on the downbeats of mm. 3 or 5 cannot be counted as indicative of the structural layout. The first relevant cadential formula occurs in mm. 12-13, after a modulation to the dominant launched in m. 5. Thereafter, the dominant key is confirmed in another cadence. The subsequent section appears similarly built. The four opening measures remain in A major but fail to convince as a structural section in its own right. They are followed by an extended modulatory process that eventually closes with a cadential formula in B minor, the tonic relative in D major. A shorter section brings about the return to the home key. The passage from m. 41 onward presents a recapitulation. Notwithstanding some small modifications and harmonically caused adjustments, it is a faithful review of the prelude's first 16 measures. The relevant harmonic processes encompass a modulation to the subdominant in the initial four measures, the return to the tonic, and the confirmation of the home key in the final four measures:

mm. 1-5 ₁	4 mm. opening	D major—D major
mm. 5-13 ₁	8 mm. modulation (1 fifth up)	D major—A major
mm. 13-16	4 mm. confirmation	A major—A major
mm. 17-21 ₁	4 mm. opening	A major—A major
mm. 21-33 ₁	12 mm. modulation	A major—B minor
mm. 33-41 ₁	8 mm. return to the tonic	B minor—D major
mm. 41-45 ₁	4 mm. modul. (1 fifth down)	D major—G major
mm. 45-53 ₁	8 mm. modulation (1 fifth up)	G major—D major
mm. 53-56	4 mm. confirmation	D major—D major

The character of this prelude is rather lively. This is indicated in the broken chords and ornamental 16th-notes as well as in the way Bach expresses his idea of meter. The dual time signature is revealing: while the 12/8 time reflects typical Baroque reluctance to accept triplets as basic note values, the *alla breve* not only hints at the occasional suspension of the compound metric pattern in favor of a simpler order, but also determines that the main beat is to be the half-measure pulse. The dual time signature also serves to eliminate doubt about the value of the eighth-notes: they take up a third of a quarter-note in all patterns like that of m. 1, but half of a quarter-note in all patterns like that in the second half of m. 2. Bach seems to conceive all notes outside the “groups of three” in the *alla breve* pulse. Thus wherever he uses accompanying rhythms in gigue-style, he writes these in dotted rhythm (see, e.g., mm. 5-7, 12, 16, etc., and mm. 23-26). These dotted-note groups have the rhythmic value that matches the triplets, i.e., they stand for a quarter-note-plus-eighth-note combination. (Bach may have avoided writing this way because he is using the quarter-note as a larger unit—half of the half-note beat—elsewhere and would thus have created more confusion with two kinds of quarter-notes.)

The prelude’s tempo should combine two requirements: swiftness (in the 16th-notes) and stateliness (in the quarter-notes and non-triplet eighth-notes). The triplet eighth-notes act as a link between the two. A good way to approach them is to make it a point not to think in groups of three but in groups of six, in accordance with the *alla breve* indication.

Ornaments occur in various forms. The cadential mordents in mm. 12 and 32 begin on the main note in an interpretation that stresses melodic steps, but may begin on the upper note if a performer chooses to focus on the virtuoso element. More melodically defined mordents like the one in m. 23, however, must begin on the main note. The inverted mordents in mm. 13 and 33 must fit into the local tonality. They thus touch use the leading-notes G \sharp and A \sharp respectively. The inverted mordents in mm. 13, 14, and 15 should be transferred to the corresponding mm. 53, 54, and 55.

The long trills need to be carefully timed as they appear in combination with triplet eighth-notes (m. 19), duplet eighth-notes (m. 20) and triplet-based 16th-notes (m. 40). The tempo of the shakes must be the same in all cases: triplet-based 32nd-notes. This posits a different number of ornamental notes against each note of the accompanying voice: 4:1 in m. 19, 6:1 in m. 20 and 2:1 in m. 40. The two former ornaments are unresolved trills ending without a suffix in a tie. The first begins on the main (16th-) note while the second sets out from the upper neighboring note shaking right away. Both stop short on the final 32nd-note before the bar line. The ornament in m. 40, by contrast, is resolved on the following strong beat and thus ends regularly, with a suffix.¹

The prelude begins in almost orchestral colors. The opening downbeat-octave—a feature not usually associated with Bach’s musical language—is followed by a figure that, in its combination of run + zigzagging broken chord, is reminiscent of a fanfare. The effect is completed in the one-bar cadential pattern in straightforward homophony and with strong emphasis on metric order that evokes an orchestral tutti picking up after a solo gesture. “Fanfare” and “tutti cadence” are then repeated (see mm. 3-5; U/M inverted, L an octave lower). From m. 5 onward, the character is different. The absence of any homophonic doubling and the appearance of a kind of dialogue between the upper and middle voices seem to suggest a change of instrumentation from larger ensemble to chamber-music setting. In this new color, the “fanfare” is used in a much shorter and therefore less clamorous version, alternating inversion (M) and original (U). The dynamic outburst traditionally inherent in fanfares appears softened to a gentle crescendo that becomes even more subdued in the lower sequence (m. 6). When the figure recurs in its original length (mm. 7-8₁: L, 10-11₁: M, 11-12: U), its character is considerably softened first by the middle-voice position, then by the inverted shape.

In mm. 5-7 and 10-11, the accompaniment consists of a four-note rhythmic figure that retains some of the stateliness of the opening measures. Yet even these “drum-beats” are interspersed with softening runs (see L: mm. 5-6, 6-7, and 10-11). Inside the bracket built by the “drum-beats,” the

¹To further enhance the prelude’s stately character it is possible (though by no means necessary) to add ornaments in certain typical patterns, where they are not specifically indicated. Notes that could be thus enhanced are: the first dotted note in a group (see, e.g., L: mm. 5 and 6, second quarter-note, etc.) and the final treble note in otherwise unornamented cadential patterns (see, e.g., U: mm. 16, 56). Such additional ornamentation emphasizes the ceremonious aspect of the piece; an interpretation that aims at highlighting the polyphonic features would therefore not make use of them.

two original components of the “fanfare,” run and zigzagging broken chord, are split between the upper and lower voices in m. 8, while only runs are left in m. 9. A cadential formula closes the development in mm. 12-13.

The four measures preceding the repeat sign present a descending sequence (compare the second to ninth eighth-note in m. 13 with the same segment in mm. 14 and 15). The material consists of varied fragments of the “fanfare” (descending runs and a three-note broken chord) along with the “drum-beat”—here with an ornament replacing the dotted-note group. The fourth measure adds a renewed cadential close in the dominant.

With regard to this prelude’s material and form, two observations are crucial:

- All components of the thematic material, even when expressing different “colors,” are derived from the initial two measures. The “fanfare” may appear split into fragments of various lengths, the homophonic cadential formula may assume different shapes, and the assertive opening octave beat may turn into different “drum-beat” patterns. Yet all can be traced back to a single two-bar cell.
- The overall design reveals a ternary form, with some specific attributes: The initial section is not only repeated but also recurs in corresponding design and material. The significant difference lies not in the inversion of voices (U/M: mm. 1-9 \approx M/U: mm. 41-49) or the few melodic variations (compare mm. 13-16 with 53-56), but in the harmonic development. The combination of a repeated exposition that modulates to the dominant, is then followed by a middle section, and is finally complemented by a recapitulation that begins and ends on the tonic, suggests sonata form.

We are thus dealing here with a prelude in sonata form based on a single thematic cell—in other words: a monothematic sonata movement.

The middle section fits well into the notion of “development section.” Its beginning in mm. 17-20 is based on the “main motif,” i.e., the combination of octave-beat, “fanfare,” and cadential close. For the first time in the prelude, the entire two-bar unit appears in inversion and at the same time contrasted with a counterpoint (U: mm. 18-20). In mm. 21-33₁, Bach develops the “chamber-music” version of the thematic components as it appeared in mm. 5-14₁. Familiar passages with only little modification (see e.g. U/M: mm. 21-23₁ and L: mm. 23-25₁) are set against new material (see L: mm. 21-23₁ and U/M mm. 22₃-25₁). The combination is then further developed (mm. 25-26), gives way momentarily to disguised parallels and virtuoso figures (mm. 27-27), and ends by returning to familiar grounds (m. 30 \approx m. 11, m. 31 \approx m. 10, m. 32 \approx m. 12).

The final portion within the development section begins in m. 33 in the same way as did, in m. 13, the third portion within the exposition. Thereafter, however, mm. 34-40 display new material that prepares the transition to the recapitulation in simple pitch lines (mm. 34-35: descending sequences; mm. 36-37: ascending sequences; mm. 38-39: descending sequences).

WTC II/5 in D major – Fugue

Beginning on the second eighth-note of an *alla breve* measure, the subject of this fugue concludes after three half-note beats, in the middle of m. 2. Its line falls from the octave to the third of the D-major scale. (The harmonic resolution, the logic of metrical organization, and also Bach's further use of the subject prove that the D on the last quarter-note of m. 2 does not belong to the subject.) In terms of phrase structure, the subject consists of a simple, indivisible unit. This is particularly noteworthy in this piece as the second half of the subject, used as a motif, permeates the entire composition so densely and frequently that one might be tempted to regard it as separable from the initial measure. Yet the indivisibility is corroborated by the harmonic layout. The subject is designed as a simple I-ii-V-I cadence. The repeated D represents I, followed by ii in the second half of m. 1. With the beginning of the new measure, i.e., during the course of the tied syncopation, the harmony changes to a V⁹ chord and resolves to I on the middle beat of this measure.



The rhythmic pattern in the subject comprises eighth-notes, quarter-notes, and a syncopated note of 3/8 duration. In the further course of the fugue, Bach adds merely a negligible number of 16th-notes. The pitch pattern in the subject consists of a tripartite note repetition, a broken chord, two consecutive larger leaps (a perfect fifth and a perfect fourth), and only at the very end two small intervals.

The dynamic development expresses both the harmonic design and the particular metric/rhythmic organization since the two coincide with regard to their tension-enhancing features. The tied note B is the obvious choice for a climax as it is not only a syncopation (and as such the most striking feature in this short unit) but also represents the shift from one harmonic step to another, a fact conferring additional tension to this note.

The fugue comprises twenty-four subject statements.

1 mm. 1-2 T	9 mm. 21-22 T	17 mm. 33-34 A
2 mm. 2-4 A	10 mm. 22-23 S	18 mm. 33-35 S
3 mm. 5-6 S	11 mm. 22-24 A	19 mm. 40-41 T
4 mm. 6-7 B	12 mm. 25-26 B	20 mm. 43-44 B
5 mm. 10-11 A	13 mm. 27-29 B	21 mm. 44-46 S
6 mm. 11-13 S	14 mm. 27-29 S	22 mm. 44-46 A
7 mm. 14-15 A	15 mm. 28-29 A	23 mm. 45-46 T
8 mm. 14-16 S	16 mm. 33-34 T	24 mm. 45-46 B



Only one of these entries is varied: the alto statement in mm. 28-29 substitutes the syncopation with a rest and transposes the four final notes a fourth up. Modifications of the beginning or the end do not occur. There are no interval adjustments in the answer, and the subject is never inverted. Strettos, however, are frequent and involve from two entries (introduced already in the first section; see mm. 5-7) to all four parts (see mm. 44-46).

Bach does not invent a counter-subject. The fugue's secondary material derives entirely from the subject itself, thus giving this piece a singularly dense and unified atmosphere. The subject's four-note ending (Ms for simpler reference) appears both as a counterpart to the subject and as an episode motif. When accompanying the subject it can appear in three positions: as a rhythmic complement, beginning after the fourth subject note (see mm. 3, 5, 6, 10, 21, 25, and 40), as a rhythmic parallel to the beginning eighth-note motion (see mm. 5, 11, 14, 21, 25, and 33), or as a stretto imitation to the subject's ending (see mm. 7, 29, 34, and 41).

a)

b)

c)

The fugue encompasses ten subject-free passages.

E1 mm. 4-5 ₁	E4 mm. 16-21 ₁	E7 mm. 29 ₂ -33 ₁
E2 mm. 7 ₂ -10 ₁	E5 mm. 24-25 ₁	E8 mm. 35-40 ₁
E3 mm. 13-14 ₁	E6 mm. 26 ₂ -27 ₂	E9 mm. 41 ₂ -43
		E10 mm. 47-50

One of the episodes is subdivided: in E4 we distinguish a principal segment that closes with a cadential formula in the middle of m. 20 from a half-measure appendix that prepares the next subject statement. In the absence of independent material, no episode presents a color contrast to the subject-determined portions. On the contrary, all sound almost like extensions to a preceding entry. This effect is achieved by Ms, the four-note group from the end of the subject.

Among the episodes we can distinguish four groups. A first group begins as a partial sequence, with Ms in the voice that just presented the subject.² The three episodes in this group are identical in length and analogous in structure. All serve as bridges between consecutive statements within a section. Their dynamic tendency is slightly rising. A second group begins in stretto imitation, often involving many entries of Ms.³ These episodes are longer. The striking density of their strettos is counteracted by descending peak-note lines (see E2: A-C#, E7: E-G, E9: D-F#). While the first of these lines features a closing formula (see mm. 9-10), the conclusion is transitory. (The chord at m. 10₁ comes with a sudden thinning of the texture, brought about by the unexpected rest in the tenor.) The other two episodes of this group have linking function. The dynamic tendency of all three episodes is that of a very gradual lessening of tension. A third group follows a stretto of subject statements with Ms strettos.⁴ The three episodes in this group are long and complex. Each concludes a section. This is obvious in the case of E10 at the end of the fugue. In the case of E4 it is supported by the closing formula (see S and B in m. 20). E8 does not show

²E1: subject ending in A, Ms sequence in A, imitated in T. E3: subject ending in S, two Ms sequences in S. E5: subject ending in A, Ms sequence in A, imitated in T.

³E2: subject ending in B, imitated in uninterrupted stretto with A/T/S/B/A/T, non-stretto imitation in B. E7: subject ending in A, imitated in uninterrupted stretto with T/S/A/B/S/T/A, second stretto with A+T/B, non-stretto imitation in B. E9: subject ending in T, imitated in stretto with A/Svar, non-stretto imitations in T+B and in S.

⁴E4: ending of subject stretto (A/S) imitated by stretto 1 with A/S/A, stretto 2 with T/S/T, stretto 3 with B/S/B/A/T, non-stretto imitation in B. E8: ending of subject stretto (T/A/S) imitated by stretto 1 with T/A/S, stretto 2 with T/A/S/T/B/A/B/S/A+B/S/A, non-stretto imitations in A and in S. E10: ending of subject stretto (S/A/T/B) imitated by stretto 1 with T/S/B/A, stretto 2 with T/B/A, stretto 3 with T/A/S, non-stretto imitation in T.

any obvious closing features, but it distinctly marks the return to the tonic (see particularly the two-octave descending scale in the bass of mm. 38-40). Structured in themselves, these three episodes are also the most self-contained in their dynamic shape: E4 describes a curve, beginning with a buildup (see the special treatment of texture in mm. 16-18) and ends with a definite relaxation; E8, despite its descending D-major scale at the end, strikes listeners with steady ascents (see the chromatic ascent in the bass of mm. 35-36, followed by ascending sequences, and the rising peak-notes in the soprano). The conclusion of this section is thus prepared as a triumph. Conversely, E10 features only descending lines and thus completes the piece on a soft note. A fourth group serves only to prepare or close a subject statement.⁵

The subject's pitch pattern with note repetition, broken chord, and consecutive fifth and fourth intervals indicates a rather lively character, as does the rhythm that, as mentioned earlier, is simple throughout the piece. The *alla breve* time signature confirms this reading. The tempo, however, finds its upper limit in the desired clarity of the material: the density of the Ms strettos can be neither properly expressed nor fully perceived if the pace is too fast. The two beats in each *alla breve* measure can therefore best be imagined as generously swinging. In view of the existing contrast in prevailing note values, the tempo proportion between the prelude and the fugue may be simple: half a measure in the prelude corresponds with half a measure in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: 92 for the dotted quarter-notes in the prelude, 46 for the half-notes in the fugue.) The articulation includes non legato, quasi legato, and legato. Within the non legato we should distinguish between more definite cuts after the quarter-notes (fourth subject note) and smoother interruptions after the syncopations—smooth enough to guarantee that the syncopation can truly be heard as “swallowing up the strong beat.” The quasi legato, too, may sound denser in the ending of the subject (Ms) than in the note repetitions. True legato applies to the few 16th-notes but also, more importantly, to the closing formulas (see U: mm. 20, 27, and 44; M: m. 50). The score does not feature any ornaments.

The fugue consists of five sections. The development of tension inside each section as well as in the entire fugue is determined by the occurrence of strettos and by the tendencies expressed in the episodes.

⁵E4a: a single statement of Ms serves, together with the two bass notes, to modulate from A major to B major. E6: cadential formula in F# minor, for once no quotation of Ms.

Section I comprises the initial round of statements, the linking E1, and E2, which concludes the section in the dominant key. The tension rises through the subject entries but declines in E2. Section II presents two single entries followed after the bridging E3 by a stretto of the same voices. E4 closes this section, once more in the dominant key. By unexpectedly weakening the cadential resolution in m. 10 with a resting tenor, Bach combines the two sections. Their union is also fortified harmonically: the weakened A-major cadence of m. 10 is taken up in a fully-voiced close at the end of section II. Beginning in four-part texture, this section picks up from the raised level of the previous development. The linking episode with its ascending sequences of Ms aids the rising motion. The growth is furthered by the advent of the first stretto and is doubled shortly in the first portion of the ensuing episode. Only then does the tension abate. The first and second sections together thus build a pair not only on the harmonic level but also with regard to the development of tension.

Section III consists of the half-bar modulation in E4b, four partly overlapping entries, the linking episode E5, and the cadential close in E6. It relates harmonically to B minor/major and F# minor/major. The beginning launches a new tension development, enhanced by the change of harmony and the thinning of texture. Although the sequence of the three opening entries dramatically raises the tension level, the mood is more restrained here than in the preceding section. The subsequent single statement and the simple closing episode underpin the lessening of drive in this short section.

Section IV encompasses two tightly interwoven three-part strettos and two longer episodes with multiple Ms strettos. It begins harmonically in the dominant (stretto at the octave), progresses through the subdominant (m. 33₁, also m. 35₁), and ends with a return to the tonic. Section V begins with two single subject statements linked by E9. It is then crowned by the triumphant quadruple stretto, after which its tension subsides gradually throughout the descending lines of the final episode E10.

Sections IV + V together form a large pair, corresponding to that built by sections I + II: Just as the A-major cadence in m. 20 completes the transitory A-major cadence in m. 10, so does the D-major cadence in the final measures complete the return to the tonic that at the end of section IV lacks the support of any cadential formula. Just as the four single entries of section I were surpassed not by the two single entries at the beginning of section II but by its stretto, so the two three-part strettos in section IV are outdone not by the two single entries at the beginning of section V but by its four-part stretto. The consistent decline of the pitch line in the final episode is understandable after such a powerful buildup.

