

WTC II/7 in E \flat major – Prelude

The most striking feature in this prelude is its rhythmic pattern. The eighth-note is not only the predominant note value, it constitutes a constant pulse suspended only briefly in mm. 67-68. In terms of texture, patterns in complementary rhythm (e.g., mm. 1-2) alternate with homophonically accompanied contours in strongly metric patterns (e.g., mm. 3 and 6-8), parallel lines (e.g., mm. 13-16), and occasional pedal notes (e.g., mm. 5-8: E \flat , mm. 13-16: B \flat). Although a number of recurring melodic figures can be identified, the prelude does not come across as dominated by thematic material. The overwhelming impression is of the continuously flowing pulsation in eighth-notes. The piece might therefore be described as metrically determined, and belongs to the compositions expressing a meditative mood.

The first harmonic progression is completed in m. 4, with a metrically weak “tail” up to the seventh eighth-note in the lower voice. The subsequent modulation to the dominant concludes in m. 12 where it features the same closing gesture. There are altogether seven sections:

- I mm. 1-4₇ tonic confirmed
- II mm. 4₈-12₇ modulation to the dominant
- III mm. 12₈-24₄ modulation to the tonic relative (C minor)
- IV mm. 24₅-32₄ return to the dominant
- V mm. 32₅-50₄ modulation to the dominant relative (G minor)
- VI mm. 50₅-61₁ return to the tonic
- VII mm. 61₁-71 tonic confirmed

Several structural correspondences meet the eye. Section I recurs at the beginning of section VII, albeit with small variants (mm. 1-4 \approx 61₈-64₁). Section II is sequenced in section III, again with variations and an enhanced texture (mm. 4-8₁ \approx 12₈-16₁). Sections III+IV are partially quoted in sections V+VI, with many small melodic modifications (mm. 21-28₇ \approx 47-54₇). Section V contains a three-measure sequence involving both hands without adjustments (mm. 32₅-35₄ \approx 35₅-38₄). Furthermore, there are two partial sequences (mm. 38₅-40₄ and 40₅-42₄).

Questions of performance practice in this prelude are closely linked to the meditative character. The pulse of continuous eighth-notes represents timing in triple meter. From a metric viewpoint, the “triplets” within each

of the beats appear as gentle embellishments that lack not only rhythmic variety but also melodic intensity.

As a result, articulation is not an issue here. At any given moment, the sound flows without interruption in at least one of the voices. As Bach takes the trouble to write many of the “triple-meter” beats in the left-hand part with rests (see mm. 3, 11, 20-23 etc.), we may assume he took it for granted that all notes, whatever their value, would be sustained for the entire duration. The performers’ concern is therefore merely to distinguish between passages of true complementary motion, in which neither interruption nor overlapping may occur (see e.g. in mm. 24₅-32₄, 56₅-60₉), notes to be sustained explicitly in order to transform broken chords into vertical chords (mm. 1₈, 3₄, 3₇, 9-10, and 26-28), and measures in which a subordinated rhythmic pattern needs to be observed (particularly those with a pedal note: mm. 5-8, 13-16, etc.).

In the interest of the atmosphere the composer tries to convey, the dynamic level throughout the prelude should remain even. Fine shades in intensity create light and shadow or foreground and background, but strong increases and decreases in tension are not called for. Details that may guide performers in this delicate task can be discovered in answer to questions like these: Does the melodic flow proceed from one eighth-note to another? (In this case, each note carries active melodic weight.) Are subsequent eighth-notes conceived as spread-out chords with additional rhythmic “fills” or “tail”? (In this case, a larger number of notes may represent a single musical unit, and may therefore have to appear under the impression of a single gesture, with not more than one weighted note.) Do subsequent notes represent two different melodic layers? (In such cases of hidden two-part structure, different coloring of the “parts” is required.)

Several ornaments appear in this piece. The grace-notes all represent eighth-note appoggiaturas resolving into quarter-note resolutions.¹ The inverted mordent in the final measure is straightforward while the one in m. 50 raises second thoughts regarding the pitch of the lower neighbor note. Despite the A_b in the key signature, this ornament requires an A_♯ as it occurs in the harmonic context of G minor. The cadential mordent in m. 68 begins on the main note and contains three or, better still, five notes.

¹The question whether the dotted note should be split into one third appoggiatura and two thirds resolution (as applies most often in J.S. Bach) or into two thirds appoggiatura and one third resolution (as demanded by his son C.P.E. Bach in the famous treatise *On the True Art of Playing the Keyboard*) does not arise here, for in all cases has the lower voice abandoned the harmony on the third beat and a resolution at that moment would thus come “too late.”

- Phrase I is conceived in an ornamented chordal structure that unfolds as a simple cadence. The only melodic feature recurring repeatedly is the figure in the lower voice that appears like a “female” extension to the downbeat chords. It will be referred to as [x] (L: mm. 1, 2, 4).
- Phrase II is characterized by a motif whose main beats are ornamented, either by a pre-beat inverted mordent (mm. 5, 6, 7 etc.: beats 1 and 2) or by an escape note (see the third beats in the same measures). M1 is accompanied by a rhythmic pedal note (mm. 5-8₁: tonic pedal). Three non-motivic measures then focus on an F-major seventh chord that triggers the modulation to the dominant. This harmonically significant moment is underpinned by [x] in the lower voice. The phrase ends with a cadential close analogous to that at the end of the first phrase (mm. 10-12 ≈ 2-4).
- Phrase III begins with M1 transposed to the dominant. Thereafter, three measures suggest a return to the tonic (see the twofold [x] stressing the harmonic significance of mm. 17-18). The recurrence in mm. 19-20 of M1 in inverted voices confirms the V⁷ chord, but the four-measure cadential close turns instead to the relative minor key.
- Phrase IV begins with almost perfect complementary motion. Figure [x] appears in the right hand in the form of a V⁷ chord. Its resolution is conceived as another figure in which tied notes form a chord. This two-measure motif (M2) is then sequenced (mm. 26₈-28₇ ≈ 24₈-26₇). The phrase ends with a modulation to B_b major.
- Phrase V begins with a new motif (M3). Its first half (mm. 32₅-33₄) consists of the same seventh chord in both voices, preceded and followed by inverted-mordent figures. Its second half (mm. 33₅-35₄) complements this, after a repetition of the seventh chord, with a descent featuring sequencing sevenths in both voices. After one complete and two partial sequences, all in ascending order, the climax (m. 43₁) spawns a four-measure extension. The phrase ends with a four-measure cadential close similar to the one that concludes the third phrase.
- Phrase VI continues the analogy by beginning with M2. It ends with ascending sequences, in a pattern that is complementary except for the dominant pedal on each downbeat (see mm. 56-60).
- The final phrase begins similarly to the initial one. The four-measure cadence is here extended and, after a short general pause (m. 67), the return to the tonic is substantiated with a renewed perfect cadence in E_b major (mm. 68-69) and an additional three-measure key confirmation.

The following simplified version of the seven phrases aims at visualizing the main features:

I *cadence a*

II *motif 1* *cadence a*

III *motif 1* *rh. pedal* *cadence b*

IV *motif 2*

V *motif 3* *cadence b* *4-bar insert*

VI *motif 2* *sequences* *dominant pedal*

VII *opening cadence, expanded*

Dynamic shading in this prelude is very restrained so as not to jeopardize the meditative calm of the composition. At the outset of phrases II-VI, the three motifs describe melodic curves of one, two, and three measures respectively, while the endings of these phrases and the framing cadences are defined by very slight harmonically induced tension developments.

WTC II/7 in E_b major – Fugue

The E_b-major subject appears firmly rooted at the outset but ambiguous at its end. Beginning with the keynote on the downbeat, it spans a little more than five or six measures. As the return to the tonic harmony occurs already on the G at m. 6₁, the question whether or not mm. 6-7₁ belong to the subject has led to many heated discussions. On the one hand, both the structural design of the phrase and Bach's very consistent use of the entire length support the view that what is harmonically but a "tail" should be regarded as an integral component of the subject. On the other hand, Bach's harmonization of this "tail" does not always remain in the tonic but often leads away from it (see, e.g., mm. 12-13, 19-20, 26-27, etc.). This is a strong argument for the shorter version. In the following analysis, we will try to keep both aspects in mind: the melodically consistent longer version [a] (which comprises a complete sequence) as well as version [b], one measure shorter but harmonically more reliable.

With regard to its pitch pattern, version [a] describes a curve that sets out from and returns to the E_b-B_b interval, enclosing several ups and downs in-between. Skips and steps seem fairly equally distributed in this phrase. Apart from the initial fifth, which swings back in steps, there is a perfect fourth (m. 3) followed by seconds that lead to a broken chord (mm. 4-5). The combination of fourth + seconds + broken chord is then sequenced. The rhythmic pattern displays great variety, with four different note values featured in the subject itself: a whole-note, several half-notes (two of them as syncopations), quarter-notes, and eighth-notes. Later in the fugue Bach adds dotted quarter-notes, 16th-notes, and various tied values.

The subject's harmonic background is interesting as it comprises two complete cadential progressions. Bach harmonizes the initial whole-note with an active step from the tonic to the subdominant (see, e.g., m. 14) or to the secondary dominant (see, e.g., m. 60), followed in m. 2 by the dominant (or dominant-seventh) and at m. 3₁ by the return to the tonic. From there onward, the syncopated C initiates another subdominant harmony.

This gives way, on or before the syncopated B \flat (see mm. 64 and 18 respectively), to the dominant, and then returns to the tonic on the downbeat of the statement's sixth measure.

I IV V⁷ I IV- - (ii⁷) IV V V⁷ I(----I)

The phrase structure behind all these details encompasses three subphrases. The first coincides with the first cadential progression, thus closing at m. 3₁. The second subphrase begins with the syncopated C and closes before the sequencing syncopated B \flat , i.e., at m. 5₁, and the third subphrase consists of the complete or shortened sequence of the second. In the light of this phrase structure, our earlier assessment of the interval structure calls for a small revision. The perfect fourths are not actually conceived as intervals (in the sense of steps within a melodic context) but mark cuts between adjacent subphrases. The pitch pattern thus balances the initial fifth and the broken chord at the end of the second and third subphrases with stepwise motion in-between.

Determining the overall climax is not difficult. The C in m. 3 not only stands out rhythmically and melodically, it also represents the definite turn to the subdominant harmony. Furthermore, the gradual relaxation in the second subphrase is echoed in the third subphrase, with a smaller climax on the syncopated B \flat and a more complete relaxation to the tonic. In the first subphrase, the initial note should be felt as an implied increase of tension (which, obviously, the keyboard is unable to produce but any string or wind player would provide very convincingly). The subphrase then peaks fairly gently on the B \flat in m. 2 before relaxing toward its end.

The fugue comprises twelve subject statements. Among them, one (marked with an asterisk in the table below) is significantly changed at both the beginning and the end. All other subject statements are given here in their full melodic length, including the contested "tail."

| | | | | | |
|---|-----------|---|----|-----------|----|
| 1 | mm. 1-7 | B | 7 | mm. 37-43 | A |
| 2 | mm. 7-13 | T | 8 | mm. 38-44 | S |
| 3 | mm. 14-20 | A | 9 | mm. 53-59 | T |
| 4 | mm. 21-27 | S | 10 | mm. 55-59 | A* |
| 5 | mm. 30-36 | T | 11 | mm. 59-65 | S |
| 6 | mm. 31-37 | B | 12 | mm. 60-66 | B |



Apart from the adjustment of the initial interval in the answer and the overall modification in the tenth entry, the subject remains basically unchanged throughout the fugue. Slight changes in pitch appear in mm. 31, 38, and 60 where the second interval in the tenor, alto, and soprano entries respectively is altered to a note repetition instead of the original descending second. The only rhythmic variation is inconsequential. It occurs in the statements beginning in mm. 30, 31, and 53 where the initial whole-note is shortened to a half-note.

Inversion and augmentation are not used, but strettos appear frequently. Their structural position and the kinds of combination chosen are interesting. The four stretto settings in this fugue include pairing of the two lower voices (T+B, mm. 30-37), the two upper voices (A+S, mm. 37-44), the two inner voices (T+A, mm. 53-59) and the two outer voices (S+B, mm. 59-66). In each of these pairs one entry is modified. An entry with an interval adjustment or any other significant variation carries less weight than one that sounds exactly like the original. The sequence of the leading voices of the four sets is thus B S T B (from ^TB, ^AS, ^TA, ^SB).

Proceeding in the traditional way, one can expect a counter-subject surfacing against the second subject statement (i.e., against the answer). Within the melodic progression introduced in the bass line in mm. 7-13, two segments can be distinguished. Their different recurrence in the course of the fugue will tell whether or not any of the segments, each one of them, or only the whole qualifies as a self-assured companion to the subject.

The first segment begins with a descending sequence of the subject's "tail" (mm. 7-8₁), which it extends into a cadential close (up to m. 9₁). This gesture recurs, with small variations at the end, three times—albeit never against the subject. Instead, it appears as an extension of subject statements (see S: mm. 27-30, A: mm. 43-45, S: mm. 44-46, B: mm. 66-68; shortened also in T: mm. 13-14). We must thus conclude that this figure is a horizontal extension of the subject's tail rather than a vertical counterpart in the manner of a counter-subject. The second segment introduced against the answer (mm. 9₂-12₁) begins and ends with the keynote (here, on the dominant, this is B₃). After an initial syncopation, the curve between the two B₃s resembles a familiar closing formula, particularly from the dotted note in m. 11 onward. This melodic unit recurs twice, against the third and the fourth subject statements (see T: mm. 16-19 and A: mm. 23-26; in the latter, see also the parallel in the tenor). We can safely thus speak of a counter-subject. The fact that it does not reappear later may be excused by the grouping of all further subject statements in strettos.

The image shows a musical score for two voices: Soprano (S) and Contralto (CS). The Soprano part is written on a treble clef staff, and the Contralto part is on a bass clef staff. Both are in a key signature of two flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The Soprano part begins with a subject statement consisting of a series of eighth notes: G4, A4, B-flat4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B-flat3, A3, G3. The Contralto part provides harmonic support with a series of chords and moving lines. Above the Soprano staff, there are three large, thin, upward-pointing arrows indicating the length of the subject statement. Below the Contralto staff, there are three large, thin, downward-pointing arrows indicating the length of the subject statement. The score shows the subject being repeated in different voices and with various accompaniments.

The number of subject-free passages in this fugue depends on the interpretation of the subject's length, as the assessment of the subject's "tail" makes all the difference. The table below is based on the following distinction: Whenever a subject statement reaches its harmonic conclusion only one measure before the beginning of the next statement—if, in other words, the subject's tail ends on the initial note of the following entry—the tail and its vertical surroundings are not considered a subject-free measure, although it must be recognized that it is harmonically defensible to hold this view. Wherever the "tail" is accompanied by a motif that plays a role in the further development of the episode, the measure is considered part of the episode. This leaves five genuine episodes:

| | | | |
|----|-----------|----|-----------|
| E1 | mm. 12-13 | E4 | mm. 43-53 |
| E2 | mm. 19-20 | E5 | mm. 65-70 |
| E3 | mm. 26-30 | | |

Four of these five episodes grow out of the end of a preceding subject statement by extending the "tail" in sequences: In E1, the tail and its sequence are accompanied by a four-note motif in the bass (B \flat -B \flat -A \flat -G) that is also sequenced a third lower. In E3, the same bass motif appears, albeit with a smaller initial interval, against the soprano entry's tail and its sequence (see F-B \flat -A-G in mm. 26-27, sequenced again a third lower). After this variation of the first episode, E3 concludes with a cadential formula in B \flat major. In E2, the subject's tail and its descending sequence are accompanied by partial parallels in the tenor and (descending) cadential steps in the bass. In E5, the descending sequence of the subject's tail is matched again by descending sequences in all other voices (mm. 65-66, 66-67). The conclusion follows here with an extended cadence.

The only longer episode is E4. Its bass motif, though not immediately related to the earlier ones, is one measure long and sequenced in descending thirds, once in identical and once in varied shape (mm. 43-46). Thereafter the two voices of the preceding stretto introduce a counterpoint of two substantial motifs (M1: alto m. 46-48 G to B \flat , M2: soprano m. 46-48 E \flat to E \flat). Exchanged in cross imitation these form a threefold chain. The overall motion is falling, accompanied by a two-measure bass figure.

The role played by these episodes in the development of the fugue can easily be deduced from the observations made above. E1 and E2 link consecutive entries with a slight decline in tension each time. E3 and E5 conclude harmonic as well as structural progressions with full cadences. E4 also creates a gradual decrease of tension but does not spell out an explicit close, thus maintaining some connection with what follows.

The fugue's basic character is determined by the variety in its rhythmic pattern that, particularly with its manifold syncopations, needs much calm to unfold. Meanwhile, the *alla breve* time signature prevents too slow a motion. The resulting calm but flowing style is also reflected in the interval pattern, which demands an alternation of tight legato in all steps and single skips and non legato for the characteristic broken chords in the tail of the second and third subphrases of the subject.

As the contemplative mood of the prelude with its triplet motion differs considerably from the duple meter in the fugue, the tempo proportion between the two pieces can be simple: a "beat" (= a dotted quarter-note) in the prelude becomes a "beat" (= a half-note) in the fugue. Approximate metronome settings: 72 for the dotted quarter-notes in the prelude and the half-notes in the fugue.

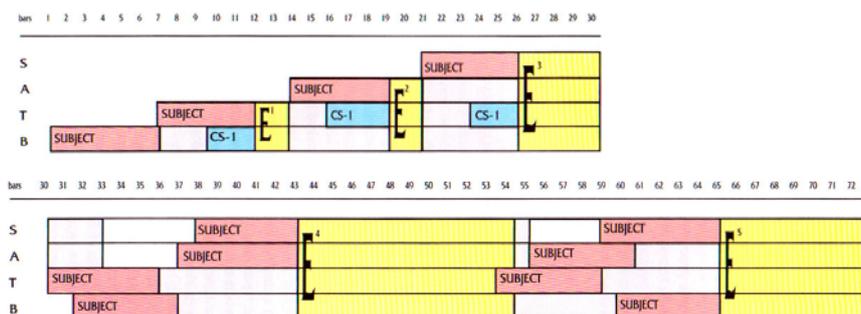
The subject with its distinct material pervades much of the fugue. Its articulation should therefore be carefully studied. In the first subphrase, E_b-B_b and A_b-G are legato. The interruption by the tension-sustaining rest should be very smooth, giving the impression that the fully sustained half-note "reaches silently across the rest" where the A_b picks up in almost equal intensity. (A drop in tension after the rest—a mistake that occurs all too easily—completely destroys the expressive significance of this rest.) Thereafter, G—C and F—B_b two measures later are separated by phrasing. The descents C-B_b-A_b and B_b-A_b-G are legato, followed by the gentlest of breaks for the note repetitions. The inverted-mordent figures resume the legato, before a softly detaching non legato distinguishes the broken chords A_b-C-F and G-E_b-E_b.

The obvious grouping of subject statements into three blocks makes it seemingly easy to determine the scope of the sections, but only the first is simple. It contains the initial statements in each of the four voices, connected by the short episodes E1 and E2 and concluded with a perfect cadence on the dominant at m. 30₁. Thereafter, the introduction of strettos marks a new section. The first stretto leads without interruption into the second, which is followed by E4, the episode that stands out both for the significance of its motivic material and for its length. Two more strettos, equally tightly linked, are rounded off by the final episode that closes the fugue.

The sequence of two strettos + episode, two strettos + episode may lead one to assume a division of these measures into two sections. The fact that each stretto-pair features a complete round of voices would support this view were it not for the lack of a harmonic close between the two blocks. In m. 53 where the tenor sets in, the other voices are in the midst of their motifs. Moreover, the B \flat -major harmony is inflected by the D \flat on the middle beat and grows into an E \flat ⁷ chord on the next downbeat. The expected resolution into the subdominant A \flat major materializes only in a metrically weak position after the second quarter-note in m. 54.

Another approach to this fugue's structure is therefore to assume a long second section, which develops from the first through overall expansion:

I = entries (B, T), E1 (link), entry (A)/E2 (link)/entry (S), E3 (close)
 ≈ II = strettos (^TB, ^AS), E4 (link), strettos (^TA, ^SB), E5 (close).



In the first section, the tension rises very gradually with the increasing number and rising order of entering voices. As both the subject's tail and the links of E1 and E2 with their descending sequences and retroactive harmonic steps have an appeasing quality, the buildup does not reach a high level, and the cadential close in mm. 29-30 concludes almost as softly as the piece began. The dynamic processes in the fugue's second section repeat those of the first section on a heightened level of intensity. The rise of tension between the first and the second strettos is stronger because of the increase in voices and the more drastic rise in pitch level. E4 with its descending sequences causes a depletion of tension, but it is counteracted by tight polyphonic interplay. The third stretto enters with slightly reduced intensity, a fact that is supported by the texture (resting soprano) and the choice of subject-carrying voices (T+A form the least exposed combination). The final stretto brings the climax, with a brilliant combination of S+B subject statements and a parallel of the two inner voices.