

WTC II/11 in F major – Prelude

The F-major prelude is a meditative piece. It is determined by metric features, particularly the uninterrupted eighth-note motion, the continuous presence of half-note beats in at least one of the complementary voices, and the abundant use of ties combining selected eighth-notes into chords. There are up to five voices, but the part-writing is not fully consistent. Although the main melodic motif moves between the player's two hands, it can hardly ever be allocated to any one voice. It may be preferable not to speak of voices or parts in this composition but to perceive the texture as eighth-note lines embedded in four- to five-part homophonic chords. The initial phrase of the prelude could thus be represented as follows:



The initial harmonic progression concludes in the middle of m. 8. As one voice after the other resolves, the tonic is regained in a metrically weak position on the third beat. This is a structurally relevant cadence. The subsequent eight measures modulate to the dominant key C major. The striking correspondence of mm. 17 and 1 suggests a “new beginning on the dominant” and thus reveals a larger structural grouping of two harmonic progressions into one section. The prelude comprises altogether four such compound sections:

I	mm. 1-8-16	I, → V
II	mm. 17-24-32	V, → iii
III	mm. 33-40-47-56	→ vi, → V, → iii
IV	mm. 57-64-72	→ IV, → I

There are several extended analogies: mm. 1-11₁ ≈ 17-27₁ (transposed), mm. 1-6₃ ≈ 57-62₃ (identical), mm. 1-3₂ ≈ 33-35₂ (transposed and varied), mm. 11-16₂ ≈ 67-72₂ (transposed and varied). Shorter correspondences are composed as full-ensemble sequences: mm. 41-42 ≈ 43-44 ≈ 45-46.

The prelude's meditative character requires a calm tempo and overall legato playing. As the slurs in m. 1 indicate, the eighth-notes must not be perceived as active individuals. Instead they should be grouped in such a way that only the metrically relevant ones carry some weight. Dynamic shaping can easily be misinterpreted in this piece. The information is not encapsulated in melodic events—in whatever voice—but in the interplay of extended harmonies woven into arabesque-like threads. Note-to-note increases or decreases would therefore mislead listeners. Gentle curves do occur, built by the metrically emphasized notes within the eighth-note threads and by the harmonic development within each phrase.

The prelude features no ornaments except for a single grace-note in m. 66. Its appearance in brackets indicates that Bach may not have notated it in his original manuscript. Since it adds greatly to the smoothness and beauty of the measure, it can safely be recommended. The grace-note represents an appoggiatura and should thus be played for half of the main note value (i.e., appoggiatura B_b = half-note, resolution A = half-note).

The weaving eighth-note lines build primarily three patterns. All begin on the first eighth-note after a strong beat with a three-eighth-note ascent that serves as an upbeat to what follows. Furthermore, all patterns consist of little four-note groups and include a varying number of sequences. The metrically strong notes of each four-note group may or may not be tied over to form sustained chords. These patterns will be referred to as P1, P2, and P3 to remind us that we are not dealing with melodic motifs. The three patterns in conjunction account for the entire prelude. On page 439 below, the relevant features of the structural layout are listed in table format, so as to allow easy comparison and overview.

P1 is introduced in mm. 1-2. An inverted turn (E-F-G-F) leads into four descending turn-figures (E-D-C-D, C-B_b-A-B_b, A-G-F-G, F-E-D-E). At the end of m. 2, a renewed upbeat seems to trigger an imitation that, however, sounds much more like a continuation of the same pattern. The line of metrically enhanced notes in mm. 1-3 (F, D, B_b, G, E; C, A, F, C) is extended with two further imitations of the turn-figure in a higher register adding G and E. Dynamically, P1 represents a protracted decrease.

P2, introduced in mm. 5-7₁ and sequenced one tone lower in mm. 7-9₁, features three inverted-turn figures in ascending sequences complemented by two turns in descending sequence. (The third turn is extended and varied: for a simple A-B_b-C-B_b mm. 5-6 present A-B_b-C—A-B_b). The metrically highlighted notes form a curve: D, F, (C)-B_b, G, E, as does the tension.

P3 is first heard in the cadential close of the first section (see the upper right-hand part in mm. 14₃-16₁). It is characteristic only at its beginning,

mm.	pattern	clue notes	structure
<i>Section I</i>			
1-4	P1	F-D-B _b -G-E-C-A-F-C + G-E	complete phrase
5-7 ₁	P2	D-F-(C)-B _b -G-E	two-measure model
7-9 ₁	P2	C-E-(B _b)-A-F-D	two-measure model sequenced
9-11 ₁	P1	D-B _b -G-C-A-D	short version, phrase 1
11-14 ₃	P1	F-D-B-G-E-C-A-F-D-B + E	variation of phrase 1
14 ₃ -16 ₁	P3	C / A – C / C	closing formula
16-17 ₁	P1	G-E-C	link
<i>Section II</i>			
17-20	P1	C-A-F-D-B-G-E-C-G + D-B	complete phrase
21-23 ₁	P2	A-C-(G)-F-D-B	two-measure model
23-25 ₁	P2	G-B-(F)-E-C-A	two-measure model sequenced
25-27 ₁	P1	A-F-D-G-E-A	short version, phrase 1
27-29 ₃	P1	D-B _b -G (parall. F-D-G) + C-A-D	development of phrase 1
29-32 ₂	P1	G-E-C#-A-F-D-B _b -G	variation of phrase 1
32-33 ₁	P1	A-F	link
<i>Section III</i>			
33-37	P1	D-B _b -G-E-C-A-F-D-B + D-G#	development of phrase 1
37-38 ₁	P2	E-B-C#	development of pattern
38-40 ₁	P3	A / E – E / D	development of pattern
40-41 ₁	P1	F-D-B _b	link
41-43 ₁	P3a	B _b / G – A-F-D	two-measure model
43-45 ₁	P3a	D / B _b – C-A-F	two-measure model sequenced
45-47 ₁	P3a	F / D – E-C-A	two-measure model sequenced
47-49 ₁	P1	F-D-B-G#-E-C	development of pattern
49-51 ₁	P1	E-C-A-F, F-D	free imitation
51-54 ₁	P1	A-F-D, F-D-B _b , D-B _b -G#	partial sequences
54-56	P1	E-C-A-E, B-A-E-C#	cadential close + link
<i>Section IV</i>			
57-60	P1	F-D-B _b -G-E-C-A-F-C + G-E	complete phrase, see 1-4
61-62 ₃	P2	D-F-(C)-B _b -G	two-measure model, see 5-6
62 ₃ -64 ₂	P3	B _b / E _b – D / B _b	free development
64 ₃ -67 ₁	P1	E _b -E _b , G-E _b -C, F-D-G	free development
67-70 ₂	P1	B _b -G-E-C-A-F-D-B _b -G-E	variation of phrase 1
70 ₃ -72 ₁	P3	F / D – F / F + A-F	closing formula

where it features not a written-out ornament but a straight four-note ascent. The immediate imitation can be distinctly perceived as a different level in the polyphonic structure, unlike the imitations in P1 and P2, which appear as integral parts of a single complementary line. The relaxation following the twofold ascent abides by no pattern. A variation of P3 occurs also in

the third section. The pattern establishes a model in which the initial ascent and its imitation are complemented by a triple turn (see mm. 41-43₁). This variant is referred to in the table above as P3a. It is followed by two sequences. In both cases this pattern, like that of P2, forms a curve. The rise and decline in P3 are slightly steeper than their counterparts in P2.

WTC II/11 in F major – Fugue

Before one considers the scope of this fugue's subject, the time signature requires a comment. Bach's 6/16, like many other compound time signatures, does not indicate that performers should count six beats in each measure. Rather, it is a way of notating music based on triplet groups without the tedious bracketing that would normally require. A conductor would beat 2/4 time. This should be kept in mind when considering questions of tempo, phrasing, small-scale dynamics, etc.

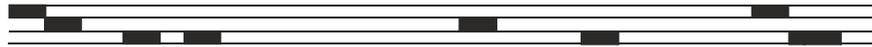
The subject is simple only at first glance. It spans four measures. In m. 5, the relevant return to the tonic occurs already on the downbeat. In many later cases, however, the two ensuing 16th-notes must be included as a passive extension or as a completion of the "larger beat." In yet other cases, these two notes form the beginning of the subsequent melodic unit. Finally there are subject endings where the same two 16th-notes do not remain within the harmony and therefore cannot conclude the phrase. We are thus dealing with a subject conceived with a "male" (strong-beat) and a "female" (weak-beat) ending. Its rhythmic pattern is simple, comprising only 16th-notes and eighth-notes (or: triplets and whole beats). A third, very characteristic rhythmic figure that is introduced outside the subject (see, from m. 5 onward, the eighth-note + 16th-note groups) gives the fugue the distinctive touch of a gigue.

The subject's pitch pattern includes inverted-mordent figures (the three-note groups in mm. 1 and 2), two larger intervals, and consecutive seconds. While the direction is upward in mm. 1-4 and downward in mm. 4-5, the former is interrupted by two restarts. Both follow cuts in the melodic flow that are emphasized by the combination of rest + wedge at mm. 2₁ and 3₁. The cuts combine with the subsequent restart to deliver an explicit message regarding phrase structure: the subject consists of the structural pattern of

Any decision regarding the dynamic shaping in this subject should take the allusion to the gigue into account. In light of this virtuoso dance and the exemplary simplicity of phrase structure that is typical of it, the three consecutive upward thrusts (F-C, A-D, and C-F) take the lead over any considerations of harmonic tension. The subject's outline thus consists of three short crescendos, each surpassing the preceding one, followed by an unbroken decrease through the octave from F to F.

This fugue features eight statements of the subject.

1	mm. 1-5	U	5	mm. 52-56	M
2	mm. 5-9	M	6	mm. 66-70	L
3	mm. 14-18	L	7	mm. 85-89	U
4	mm. 21-25	L	8	mm. 89-95	L



The subject undergoes few changes. In the tonal answer, the first leap is modified from a fifth to a fourth. In three instances, the female ending of the initial statement (i.e., the melodic ending on a weak beat) is substituted by a male ending (see entries 4 and 8, mm. 25 and 89 respectively, and m. 95 where the harmonic resolution occurs on the downbeat and is followed by a new active step in the 16th-notes.) No inversions, strettos, or parallels of the subject are used in this fugue. In addition to the modification of the ending, the two final statements feature further changes. The penultimate entry fluctuates between the major and minor modes: its beginning is surrounded by the F-minor chord but the subject's fifth note is A \sharp . This is followed by D \flat , which in turn gives way to D \sharp (see mm. 85-87). The same entry also surprises with its thickened texture: mm. 86-87 contain two chords with five and one with six parts. The final entry is expanded not vertically but horizontally, by way of additional sequences of its head motif (see mm. 89-93). It is further set apart from the remainder of the composition by an accompaniment in 32nd-note runs that does not occur anywhere else. Bach does not give this subject any regular companion or counter-subject.

As the list of the subject statements reveals, by far the largest portion of this fugue is taken up by passages in which the subject is absent. Only 34 of the 99 measures feature the subject, while the remaining two thirds fall into six episodes, some of them surprisingly long.

E1	mm. 9-14	E4	mm. 56-66
E2	mm. 18-21	E5	mm. 70-85
E3	mm. 25-52	E6	mm. 95-99

In the construction of these episodes, material derived from the subject plays a vital role. Its third subphrase, which we will call “Ms,” is used frequently, with or without the ascending half-measure upbeat. In E2 we find three imitations of Ms without its upbeat: mm. 18-19 (M), 19-20 (U), and 20-21 (L). In E3, Ms appears five times extended by an additional interval of a fourth: mm. 29-30 (L), 30-31 (U), 31-32 (M), 32-33 (U), and 36-37 (U). Still in E3, Ms (now without the additional leap but with its original upbeat) occurs four times in the lower voice: see mm. 44-52. The last recurrence of Ms can be heard in E5, mm. 70-72, in the lower voice as a partial sequence of the preceding subject statement.

Other characteristic episode material includes one motif and several sequence-models.¹ M1 is introduced in E1 (mm. 9-10: B_b-E_b) and subsequently fills the entire episode with its imitations. It recurs in the middle of E3, both in its original shape (M: mm. 37-38 and U: 38-39) and in a variation with a suspension of the third note (M: mm. 39-44 and U: mm. 39-45). This variation of M1 is sequenced twice in ascending direction in both the middle and upper voices. At the same time, the lower voice also presents a group of notes (see mm. 38-40: E-F) that recurs twice in rising sequences. The three voices together thus form what we may call Model 1.

E4 contains two models, both of them short and occurring only in U + M. In mm. 57-58, the middle voice imitates the upper voice in a three-note ascent. This combination is sequenced twice in rising direction. Similarly, the same two voices establish another short model in mm. 62-63 that is sequenced three times in falling direction. E5 also contains two such models. A very generous eye might even detect a relationship with those in E4, last but not least because the two episodes share the pedal note feature. The first model in E5 appears in mm. 72-73. It, too, is conceived as an imitation between U + M with three notes but including a note repetition. Three falling sequences follow here. The second model in this episode materializes in mm. 78-79. It is more complex since the middle-voice figure is longer. Once again ascending sequences follow. Finally there is one figure that only ever appears in the lower voice but presents its sequences without the support of coinciding sequences in other voices. It is thus neither a real model nor a true motif. This sequential figure first appears in mm. 25-26 where it is followed up to m. 28₁ by two ascending sequences. Exactly the same order of events recurs in mm. 95-98₁.

¹As regards this distinction: it is common to call a melodic unit a motif if it recurs in more than one place and in more than one voice. Sequence models, by contrast, are short-lived, usually involve more than one voice, and remain unchanged in their texture.

The fugue contains only one significant cadential close. It resembles the final close to a remarkable degree (compare mm. 25-29 with 95-99) and must thus be interpreted as dividing the longest episode into two segments: E3a and E3b.

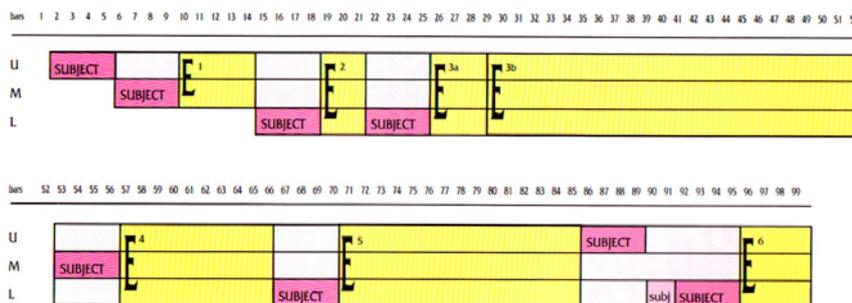
Summing up, one can distinguish three types of episodes in this fugue: motivically determined episodes with imitation (E1 and E2), episodes built mainly on sequence-models (E4 and E5), and cadential episodes (E3a and E6). Then there is the composite construction of E3b with motifs and models that, with its twenty-three measures, is almost as long as the four initial subject entries together.

The character of this fugue is determined by its metric and rhythmic allusion to the gigue. Like all giges, it is lively. Most of its 16th-notes constitute ornamental figures or runs. They should be articulated accordingly: legato for the written-out inverted mordents in the subject's first and second subphrases but quasi legato or even leggiero for runs like the one in the subject's third subphrase. The typical eighth- + 16th-note pattern is decidedly bouncing, with a hint of heavy-light, heavy-light. Also derived from the gigue is the combination of the two rhythmic patterns: a triplet followed by an eighth- + 16th-note group (see, e.g., U: m. 8) in which the shorter note is traditionally unaccented. Dotted eighth-notes are non legato, with exceptions occurring only where a tie forms another pattern typical for the gigue: the suspension followed by 16th-notes (see, e.g., M: mm. 23-24). In such cases, the suspension acts as the first of a 16th-note group and is therefore not separated from what follows.

The tempo of this fugue can be as lively as the 32nd-notes toward the end allow. The score features no ornament symbols. The tempo proportion between prelude and fugue is simple: a half-note in the prelude corresponds with a full measure in the fugue. Approximate metronome settings: prelude beats = 60, fugue beats (dotted quarter-notes) = 120.

The two blocks of four subject statements each make a first assessment of the structure easy. E1 and E2 act as bridges between consecutive entries in the first section. E4 and E5 appear in structurally analogous position in the second round of entries but differ on account of their bass pedals. But then there is a larger open question that has a decisive impact on performance. The conspicuous correspondence between E3a and E6 suggests that the first section might end in m. 29. As, however, the second round of subject entries definitely begins not earlier than in the middle of m. 52, we find ourselves in the following predicament: A reading of this fugue as comprising three sections whereby the central section is completely devoid of subject statements is unorthodox both with regard to a fugue (whose

sections are essentially defined by subject statements) and with regard to a *gigue* (a dance conventionally laid out in binary form). The assumption that Bach may have balanced a first section of 28 measures with a second section of 70 measures is equally unconvincing and does not have precursors in either genre, fugues or *gigues*. Conversely, if one decides that the fugue's initial section must be meant to include the entire third episode, the result is a layout in approximately equal halves (51 + 48 measures). Yet this decision comes at the expense of ignoring the cadential close in m. 29 and the analogy of E3a and E6. The color sketch shows only this latter option, without intending to forestall the conclusion.



The *gigue*-like character of this fugue determines the mood to such an extent that increases and decreases of tension play only a subordinate role. Furthermore, the dynamic layout of this fugue is closely related to the interpretation of the design and thus reflects back on the predicament mentioned above. A compromise that evades the problem (without solving it, though) is to play the first section as consisting of two halves. The first half is determined by subject entries and episodes that connect (E1, E2) or close (E3a) them. This portion therefore sounds in the usual touch for *gigues* (*mf-f*, or register I). The second half of section I, comprising the remainder of E3, would then consist exclusively of secondary material and therefore sound like a shadow, or musing afterthought, of the preceding (*p*, or register II).

Consistency would then require that the second section be interpreted as an intertwining of the two levels. Thus E4 and E5 would be played as “afterthoughts” following each subject statement separately, and therefore soft (register II), unlike E1 and E2 with whom they correspond structurally but not in material or, in this option, intention. Of the episodes in the second section, only E6 will then sound on the dynamic level I.