

WTC II/14 in F# minor – Prelude

The F#-minor prelude is conceived in a texture of three parts assuming different degrees of melodic significance. The upper voice dominates by far the largest number of measures. Occasional imitations take place between upper and middle voice but never involve the lower voice, which is limited to scalar motions in neutral note values, cadential accompaniment, some ornamented broken chords, and occasional links. Although the main melodic component of the prelude recurs twice in the course of the piece, complete with its accompaniment and imitation, one cannot speak of a motivically determined composition. This component is used in an almost improvising manner, as are other models spawning sequences. It would thus be fitting to speak of an improvisation around a few thematic models, connected by passages in free play.

A cursory glance at the beginning of the piece reveals that each of the three initial measures contains a perfect cadence in the home key. These harmonic progressions thus do not serve structural purposes. Bach allows for a first caesura at the modulation to the dominant key (see m. 72 where the C#-major chord is preceded by a partial representation of the G#⁹ chord, B#-D#-F#-A). As this harmonic conclusion takes place on a weak beat, the truly convincing section ending may still be pending. This occurs with the reconfirmation of the modulation to C# and the return of the first component in m. 12.

The prelude can be divided into four sections:

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| I | mm. 1-7 ₂ -12 ₁ | tonic to dominant | F# minor—C# minor |
| II | mm. 12-21 ₁ | dominant to rel. major | C# minor—A major |
| III | mm. 21-29 ₁ | rel. major to dominant | A major—C# major |
| | link 29-30 ₁ | return to tonic | |
| IV | mm. 30-43 | tonic confirmed | |

There are no substantial analogies beyond mm. 1-2₂ ≈ 12-13₂ ≈ 30-31₂.

The prelude emanates a sense of calm, a floating unearthliness. This effect is achieved by a combination of various means. There are, first of all, a great number of different note values and used alternately in melodic lines, as part of hidden two-part structure, and in ornamental patterns: half-notes with or without tie prolongation, dotted quarter-notes and quarter-notes, dotted eighth-notes and eighth-notes, normal 16th-notes and 16th-note triplets, and even dotted 16th-notes and 32nd-notes all take part

in the melodic processes of this piece. In addition to numerous ties that often only have a passive function in complementary-rhythm patterns, there are also syncopations occurring in active positions (see, e.g., the syncopated quarter-notes in mm. 1 and 2, and the syncopated eighth-notes in mm. 3, 5, etc.).

The pitch patterns in this prelude suggest constant changes in the melodic value of the single note. The first two measures may serve as an example for what exerts crucial influence on the mood and character.

- In the upper voice, the notes in beats 1 and 2 are melodic, the 16th-note triplets are an ornamentation of the simple line C \sharp -B-A, and even the regular 16th-notes in m. 2₁₋₂ represent a written-out turn figure around the A that is the target note of the little melodic component. The 16th-note C \sharp is a link, while the following eight notes are a parallel to the middle voice that is now in the lead with its imitation of the main component. The “essential” melodic content of these two measures thus consists merely of the following line: F \sharp -C \sharp —A-B-C \sharp -B-A—. Subtle touch control and dynamic coloring is crucial to bring out all the nuances.
- In the lower voice, all notes in m. 1 represent melodic steps of secondary importance. The keynote at m. 2₁ qualifies serves as a harmonic support.
- In the middle voice, the three notes forming the rising F \sharp -minor triad do not represent a melodic event but, together with the initial F \sharp of the lower voice, provide harmonic support. The high F \sharp marks the beginning of one of the traditional harmonic closing formulas (do-si-do) and thus acquires secondary melodic quality. Its resolution doubles as a beginning of the principal component’s imitation. This F \sharp , together with the subsequent C \sharp -A-B, are melodic notes of primary importance, while the triplets concluding the measure are an ornamentation of C \sharp -B-A, as was explained above for the initial presentation of the melodic component in the upper voice.

The articulation in this prelude is uncomplicated. Basically, legato applies to all notes that belong either to a melodic line, an ornamented melodic line, or a broken chord representing a vertical effect (i.e., a harmonic support, as explained above for M: m. 1). Non legato is appropriate only for the slower note values that progress melodically in skips (see, e.g., L: mm. 14-15₁, 16-17₁, 18-19₁, mm. 1₃-2₁ A-C \sharp -F \sharp , mm. 22-23₁ G \sharp -C \sharp -F \sharp -B, mm. 24-25₁ A-D \sharp -G \sharp -C \sharp , etc.), and for cadential-bass patterns as in mm. 11-12: G \sharp -C \sharp and mm. 20-21 E-E-A.

The score features three ornaments in mm. 9, 23, and 25. All appear as mordents in brackets, suggesting that they do not stem from the main source today's scholars regard as authoritative for Bach's intentions. If played, all begin on the main note and comprise a simple three-note shake. It might, however, be a good idea to consider abstaining from additional ornamentation in a piece so rich in written-out embellishments.

The musical events in this prelude can be viewed from two entirely different viewpoints. One approach is to trace a hidden large-scale framework that, while only the skeleton of the prelude, might provide important orientation for the integration of small-scale events into a larger design. The large-scale processes, together with the dynamic outlines in the main components, are better shown visually than explained verbally.

The image displays a musical score for a prelude in F# minor, spanning 43 measures. The score is presented in a grand staff format, with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature consists of two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into five systems, each with measure numbers indicated below the staves. The first system covers measures 1 through 12, the second system covers measures 12 through 21, the third system covers measures 21 through 29, the fourth system covers measures 30 through 38, and the fifth system covers measures 39 through 43. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Three ornaments, represented by mordents in brackets, are placed above specific notes in measures 9, 23, and 25. The score concludes with a final cadence in measure 43.

The other, more conventional approach traces the melodic patterns and sequence models. The principal component, together with its “contrapuntal” lower voice, the filling broken chord, closing formula, and subsequent melodic imitation in the middle voice, recurs in mm. 12-13 (imitation shortened) and in mm. 30-31. The syncopation figure introduced in U: m. 3 reappears (always in the treble) in a large variety of pitch patterns throughout the prelude (see mm. 5, 22, 24, 28, 32, 33, 34, 36, and 41). In mm. 13₂-15₂, a three-part model is presented that is sequenced one note lower in mm. 15₂-17₂ (with small variations in the lower voice) and then followed by two contracted sequences (see mm. 17₂-18₂ and 18₂-19₂) and a cadential close. A second three-part model is introduced in mm. 21-22 (U: from m. 21₂ E; M+L from m. 21₁). This model is sequenced one note higher, also followed by three contracted sequences (mm. 25, 26, and 27) and a harmonic conclusion in an imperfect cadence with fermata and general pause (m. 29). The prelude’s final section, having begun once more with the main idea, does not establish any new models but freely alternates the syncopation figure with patterns formed from 16th-note triplets. An interrupted cadence at m. 39₁ diverts a formula that seemed headed for C# minor in favor of an arrival, in one voice after another, at the tonic with Picardy third.

WTC II/14 in F# minor – Fugue

Beginning on the fourth eighth-note of m. 1 and concluding at m. 4₁, this subject spans a little less than three measures. The characteristic trill on the penultimate note, which Bach uses so often in the first volume of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* but only this once in the second volume, marks the end of the phrase. The pitch pattern comprises a broken chord and three large intervals (sixth, fourth, and fifth) as well as two written-out inverted mordents. A glance across the remainder of the fugue shows that leaps and broken chords are a constant feature. With regard to rhythm, the subject features 16th-notes, eighth-notes, three quarter-notes prolonged by ties to form syncopations, and the ornamented half-note. This rhythmic complexity is not, however, typical for the entire piece but later gives way to long stretches in a much simpler pattern.

The subject’s phrase structure allows for two interpretations, depending on whether an interpreter wishes to emphasize the rhythmic particularities or the melodic backbone. The subject’s rhythmic pattern can be regarded

as consisting of two similar halves, with the second slightly extended: see upbeat (♩♩♩) / syncopation / inverted mordent / long note varied to become upbeat (♩) / syncopation / inverted mordent / short note + tail (F#-G#-F#). In this light, the subject presents itself as divided into two subphrases. The pitch pattern presents a different message. It can be described as combining a broken-chord upbeat followed by an ornamented descending scale. This scale features three syncopated half-notes leading, after a quarter-note inserted to “correct the meter” (so to speak) to a strong-beat half-note that resolves onto the keynote: upbeat-D—C#—B—A—G#—F#. In this view, subphrasing is inconceivable and the subject appears as one indivisible unit.¹ The subject’s harmonic layout (which can be observed most easily in mm. 16-19) emphasizes the syncopations by allotting each of them a shift from a primary function to a secondary dominant:

i iv V^7_{III} III V^9_{vii} vii V^7 i V^7 i

The dynamic development in the subject obviously depends on one’s choice with regard to phrasing. The overall climax, however, is undisputed. The D# combines all tension-enhancing aspects: as the first syncopation, it is metrically most exposed; as the representative of the subdominant chord, it is the target of a harmonically active step; as the sixth degree of a minor scale, it holds special melodic tension; and in terms of interval structure, it is approached in what is the largest leap in the subject and a high-tension interval.

The two possible interpretations thus differ primarily in what happens in the middle of m. 2. In an indivisible phrase, the C#s are not too relaxed as they hold tension that will be released throughout the descent to the final note. The eighth-note F# following the second C# is played lightly, as a kind of charm note interrupting the (more important) line from C# to B. By contrast, in a divided phrase the syncopated C# is the ending of the first subphrase and thus very relaxed, while the ensuing F# acts as a new upbeat and is thus an expressive, actively forward-bouncing note.

¹There is no “right” and “wrong.” At this early point in material appreciation, the preference depends entirely on the view adopted by each individual interpreter. Later in the fugue we may find that other components work better with one of these concepts than with the other, but so far, the choice is one of taste only.

The complete subject appears ten times in the course of the fugue.

1	mm. 1-4	M	6	mm. 34-37	L
2	mm. 4-7	U	7	mm. 51-54	M
3	mm. 8-11	L	8	mm. 54-57	U
4	mm. 16-19	U	9	mm. 60-63	L
5	mm. 28-31	M	10	mm. 66-69	U

Inversion, stretto, and parallel do not occur, and the changes in the subject's shape are minor. The characteristic adjustment of the initial interval in the answer occurs only in m. 4 as the two further subject statements appearing in the harmonic position of an answer (mm. 54 and 60) both feature a varied beginning. The subject's ending is modified in mm. 36-37, where the ornamented step is replaced by a cadential-bass pattern, and in m. 69, where the resolution of the trill is delayed.

Bach invents no regular counter-subject for this fugue. Instead, components of the subject itself appear in different combinations as contrapuntal material.² Nonetheless, this is by no means all there is to be said about the primary material, for as one discovers only later, this F#-minor fugue is a triple fugue: a fugue with three subjects. The second and third subjects are introduced separately before they are combined with the first. Moreover, as with the first subject, several of their components appear as contrapuntal material, eventually accompanying any of the three subjects.

The second subject makes its first appearance in L: mm. 20-22 after an A-major cadence. Beginning thus in the major mode, its initial descent with the characteristic dotted-note group leads to a raised fifth that implies a modulation back to the original tonic: E#, the leading note to F#, leaves A major. The ensuing fourth leap to the syncopated F# seems to introduce a traditional closing formula, and indeed this do-si-do figure constitutes the ending of the second subject in several of its later statements (see e.g. M: mm. 56-57 and mm. 62-63; L: mm. 68-69; with slight variation also L: mm. 24-25). In the first few presentations of this second subject, however, the resolution is omitted, replaced by a chromatic descent to E#. This is tied and resolves belatedly (outside the subject's actual scope) onto a note that initiates a cadential-bass pattern in B major. The rhythmic pattern of this

²See mm. 4-7. What begins like an independent voice (diatonic ascents interrupted by a tritone leap downward and various rests) ends with a partial imitation of the subject's end. In mm. 8-11 the secondary voices both imitate the subject's initial broken chord.

second subject is thus extremely intricate, with a 16th-note, eighth-notes, a dotted eighth-note, and a syncopated half-note. The salient feature in the pitch pattern is the fourth leap that confirms the initial modulation. This leap also focuses dynamic tension, shaping the second subject into a single curve with the climax on the syncopated half-note.

The following table lists the complete statements of the second subject. (Its head motif particularly is used freely in-between). Interestingly, the number of these statements is again ten and thus the same as that of the statements of the main subject.

1	mm. 20 ₃ -22 ₁	L	6	mm. 27-29	M
2	mm. 21 ₃ -23 ₁	U	7	mm. 30-31	L
3	mm. 22 ₃ -24 ₁	M	8	mm. 56-57	M
4	mm. 23 ₁ -25 ₁	L	9	mm. 61-63	M
5	mm. 27-28	U	10	mm. 68-69	L

The third subject is introduced in M: mm. 36-37. Apart from its eighth-note upbeat it consists exclusively of 16th-notes in an ornamental pattern. Its structure is simple as the second half is a sequence of the first, so that the phrase can be described as “upbeat + half-measure with 16th-notes + half-measure sequence + final note.” (The ensuing eighth-note leaps, while included in the first imitation, do not form part of this subject later on. Moreover, the harmonic conclusion is reached at the D# on the middle beat of m. 37.) The dynamic shape consists of a long decrease after a very active upbeat.

This subject, although entering so late, manifests eleven times and thus in even more entries than S1 and S2:

1	mm. 36-37	M	6	mm. 42-43	M
2	mm. 37-38	U	7	mm. 44-46	L
3	mm. 38-39	L	8	mm. 45-47	U
4	mm. 39-40	M	9	mm. 55-57	L
5	mm. 40-42	L	10	mm. 60-63	U
			11	mm. 67-69	M

The short component undergoes two kinds of modifications: its beginning is frequently varied³ and its extension is expanded to twice the original length in the last three entries where its scope is adjusted to that of S1.

The presentation of the three subjects in this fugue follows a pattern that allows for an almost ideal appreciation of each one. S1 appears in its

³See M: m. 42 = fifth instead of second; L: mm. 44-45, U: mm. 45-46 and L: m. 55 = three 16th-notes instead of one eighth-note.

three initial statements plus one redundant entry (M, U, L, U) before S2 first emerges. S2 is then given space for an equal number of statements (see mm. 20-25₁: L, U, M, L) plus an additional tight stretto (mm. 27-29). The redundant lower-voice entry of S2 in mm. 23-25 and the stretto both hint at the re-emergence of S1 (see the broken chord followed by a syncopation in M: mm. 24-25 and L: mm. 28-29). The juxtaposition of S1 and S2 in mm. 28-31 is thus gradually prepared. It retreats equally gradually in that the following lower-voice entry of S1 is contrasted only with the head motif of S2 instead of its full phrase. S3, as if eager to make its appearance, enters in overlap with both the conclusion of the S1 entry and the melodic closing formula in U: mm. 36-37. After thus taking the stage somewhat impatiently, S3 is given room not only for its first round of three-plus-one statements (mm. 36-40: M, U, L, M, concluded by a melodic closing formula in U: mm. 40-41) but for two more entry pairs (L, M: mm. 40₄-43₃, L, U: mm. 44₄-47₁). The first of these pairs is accompanied by two reminders of S1: the inversion of the S1 answer's head (see the parallel in U + M: m. 41) and the syncopation + inverted-mordent figure in M: mm. 41-42. The two quotations may be interpreted as an anticipation of the impending juxtaposition of S1 and S3. The announcement is not, however, immediately followed up, and further S3 statements unfold without any interference of the two earlier subjects.

The re-emergence of the main subject announces the great synthesis in three three-subject juxtapositions:

mm.	54-57	60-63	66-69
U	S1	S3	S1
M	S2	S2	S3
L	S3	S1	S2

The music example shows the dynamic juxtaposition:

The fugue encompasses ten subject-free passages.

E1	mm. 7 ₁ -8 ₄	E6	mm. 43 ₃ -44 ₄
E2	mm. 11 ₃ -16 ₂	E7	mm. 47 ₁ -51 ₄
E3	mm. 19 ₁ -20 ₄	E8	mm. 57 ₃ -60 ₂
E4	mm. 25 ₁ -27 ₁	E9	mm. 63 ₁ -66 ₄
E5	mm. 31 ₃ -34 ₂	E10	mm. 69 ₃ -70

These episodes feature fragments of the three subjects, elements from the non-thematic components that accompany the subjects in lieu of counter-subjects, as well as three largely independent episode motifs.⁴ Material from S1 is heard primarily in the exposition of S1 (i.e., in E1, E2, and E3), the S2-head enriches the secondary material in the context of the exposition of S2 (i.e., in E4), and the motif derived from S3 plays a corresponding role in the exposition of the third subject (i.e., in E6 and E7). The S1/S2 juxtaposition is followed by E5 with material from the first two subjects. The greatest independence of secondary material is reached in the two episodes linking the three three-subject juxtapositions (i.e., in E8 and E9).

A fugue with such a wealth of thematic material requires more than a simple answer when it comes to characterization. Contour and rhythm in the three subjects suggest different color shades within the same piece, with a distinct easing of the complexity from the first to the third subject.

The third subject is lively. Its rhythm pattern is simple and its line ornamental. Under its influence (mm. 37-51), the surrounding material also displays a predominance of eighth- and 16th-notes with frequent leaps. The appropriate articulation for this subject is quasi legato (or very crisp, light legato) in the 16th-notes and equally light-weighted non legato in the S3 upbeat and the accompanying eighth-notes.

S2 is the most melodious component in the fugue. Its beginning and end, i.e., the four-note descent and the conclusion in either closing formula or chromatic deflection, are best expressed in legato. The consecutive leaps in the middle demand detaching. Performers may choose whether to treat the thus separated C# as an active force in preparing the climactic F# (and therefore play it only slightly softer than the syncopation) or as an escape from the line consisting of the stepwise progression A-G#-F#-E#-F# etc. (and thus give it a much softer tone color than its surroundings).

⁴M1 cf. U: mm. 11₃-13₁ A-A, imitated in M: mm. 13-14),

M2 cf. M: mm. 11-13, F#-E, imitated in U: mm. 13-14), and

M3 cf. L: mm. 12-14₁ E-D#, sequenced in mm. 14-16; partially taken up in M: m. 24, L: m. 28, and M: mm. 32-33).

S1 contains features of both characters. The complexity of the rhythm, particularly in the two syncopations, needs time (and thus calm), while the overwhelming content of leaps as well as the two ornamental figures epitomize liveliness. The secondary material that derives from this subject and often accompanies it also prioritizes leaps. The practical difference for the articulation in this subject is, however, minimal. In both the calm and the lively characters, the initial broken chord with the ensuing leap and the consecutive leaps in m. 2 are non legato. As there is a harmonic change within the first and third syncopations that converts the tied portion into an appoggiatura, these long notes must be tightly linked to the ornamented figures that follow (legato in mm. 1₄-2₁: D-C# and in mm. 2₄-3₁: B-A). Only the three notes in m. 3 (A-F#-G#) are legato or non legato depending on the performer's approach to the basic character.

The best solution for the entire fugue is to assume a rather lively basic character in a moderately flowing tempo. The relative tempo of the prelude to the fugue is complex. The easiest way of perceiving the proportion is to convert a triplet 16th-note in the prelude into a 16th-note in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: prelude beats = 52, fugue beats = 78.)

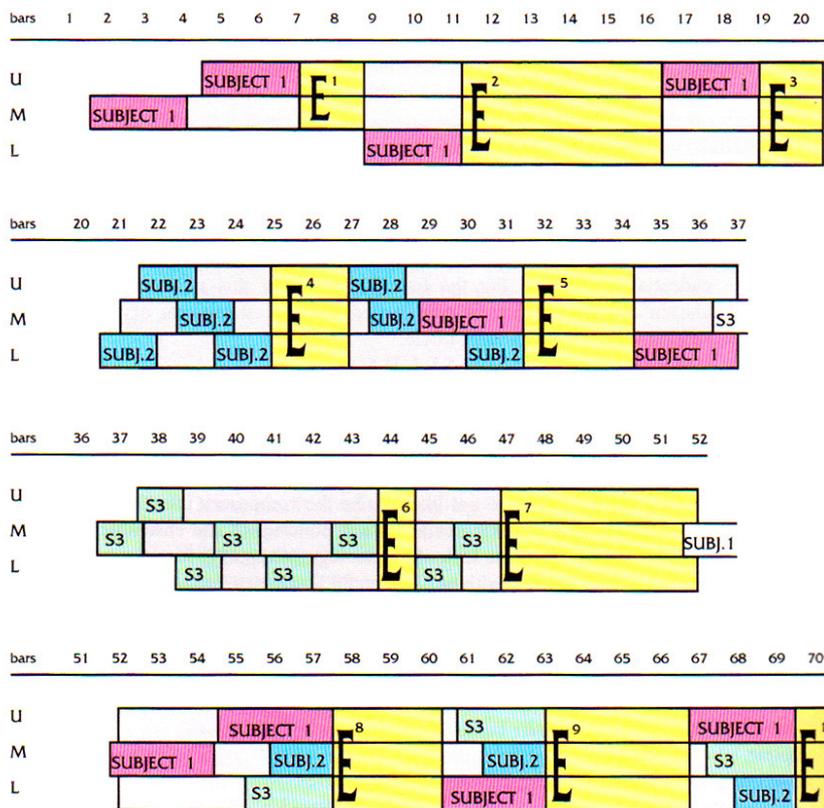
The articulation of the secondary material in mm. 1-20 requires primarily lightly detached notes, with legato only in the two melodic closing formulas (U: mm. 10-11 and L: mm. 15-16) and the neutrally colored cadential-bass notes in L: m. 20. S2 and the motif derived from it sound legato but are often surrounded by non legato notes. In the sphere dominated by S3, the only longer notes requiring legato are those in melodic closing formulas (U: mm. 36-37, 49-51, 51-52, and 70). Finally, in E8 and E9 it is possible to suggest relationships between M2 and S1 by playing M2 non legato, and between M3 and S2 by playing M3 legato.

The prominent ornament in this fugue is the trill in the subject. As it forms part of the thematic material, it must be played in each entry, regardless of whether or not Bach notes this. The trill is approached stepwise and therefore begins on the main note. Its shakes are twice the speed of the fastest note values, meaning: the trill is launched from a 16th-note before it continues in fourteen 32nd-notes, the last two of which constitute a suffix. There are only two S1 statements that either preclude the ornament owing to a varied ending (mm. 36-37) or feature a trill that ends without the suffix in a tie (m. 69).

The structure of the F#-minor fugue is basically simple despite what could be described as a three-dimensional layout. We can distinguish four larger blocks, dominated respectively by S1, S2, S3 and the three-subject juxtapositions. These are the details:

- I consists of the three initial entries of S1 (the third concluding in a closing formula), the short linking E1, the more substantial E2, a redundant entry, and the concluding E3 whose cadential-bass pattern confirms the modulation to the tonic relative (A major) on the middle beat of m. 20 (S1: M U L, U).
- II encompasses two segments. IIa presents three initial statements of S2 plus a redundant entry. This fourth entry introduces the final version of the second subject with its resolving ending and thereby concludes this segment at m. 25₁, still in A major (S2: L U M, L). IIb begins with an episode featuring three entries of the S2-derived motif. It is followed by a S2 stretto, a S1/S2 juxtaposition, a longer episode, and an S1 entry accompanied by the S2-derived motif. The section concludes with a cadential formula in C# minor, the minor dominant, at m. 37₁ (S2: U M L, S1: M L).
- III encompasses three segments. IIIa is launched prematurely in a one-measure overlap with the previous section. It presents the three initial statements of S3 plus a redundant entry. This redundant entry is accompanied by a melodic closing formula that marks the modulation to G# major, the secondary dominant V/V (S3: M U L, M). IIIb is very short, containing only two S3 entries and a reiteration of the cadence in G# major (S3: L M). IIIc begins, similarly to the last segment of section II, with an episode featuring the S3-derived motif. It is followed by two further entries of S3 and a longer episode concluding in m. 52 with a melodic closing formula in the subdominant B major⁵ (S3: L U).
- IV begins almost like section III with an overlap (here of eighth-notes only). Its opening S1 statement represents the subdominant key, but the second half of m. 54 modulates back to the tonic. There follow the three three-subject juxtapositions, linked by two episodes and rounded off by a short cadential conclusion. For the four S1 entries of this section Bach has chosen the same voices as in the four statements of the first section, thus closing a large bracket (S1: M U L, U; S2: M M L; S3: L U M).

⁵Note that there is a misprint in the score here: in mm. 49-50, all voices cancel the G# to G; except for the lower voice on the middle beat of m. 50 where the natural is almost certainly omitted by mistake.



As is obvious from the layout, the issue in this fugue is the separate presentation and eventual juxtaposition of contrasting subjects. Superimposed dynamic developments are therefore not likely to be the composer's intention. While the exposition of S1 constitutes a gradual build-up of the ensemble from single-voiced to three-part texture, the lack of enhancing contrapuntal features limits the dynamic development. The expositions of S2 and S3 present a similar picture. Section IV is the most intense in the fugue. This applies to the entire section rather than to any single entry. The fugue thus presents itself as a composition with four sections in four different shades of emotional involvement. The only color contrasts within each section are provided by the episodes.