

WTC II/15 in G major – Prelude

This prelude can be categorized as a playful piece. It features a simple rhythmic pattern with almost constant 16th-note motion including conventional figurations in hidden two-part structure over repeated indirect pedals. All thematic components share a surprisingly low melodic profile.

The first harmonic progression announces a conclusion in D major in m. 13 but is diverted in the manner of a deceptive cadence to B minor. A perfect cadence in the expected dominant is delayed until the repeat sign. The second section concludes in m. 28 with a cadential formula different in detail but analogous in function to the one that was interrupted before (mm. 27 \approx 13). The key reached here is E minor, the tonic relative. Although this is a perfect cadence that does not need “correcting,” it is followed in mm. 31-32 by another harmonic close over a similar bass figure, confirming a modulation to the subdominant C major. The return to the tonic seems imminent from m. 37 onward. Yet the cadential formula in m. 45—the same formula that has been heard twice before—leads again into a deception (m. 46: E minor instead of G major) and is only in mm. 47-48 followed by a perfect cadence in the home key.

The prelude encompasses several crucial structural correspondences: mm. 1-6 \approx 17-22 \approx 37-42 (varied), mm. 9-11 \approx 23-25 (transposed, varied), and mm. 11-16 \approx 43-48 (transposed).

The basic character of this composition is clearly rather lively. The tempo may be swift and flowing. The appropriate articulation distinguishes quasi legato for the 16th-notes in the hidden two-part structure and a denser legato for the 16th-notes in ornamental figures¹ from a gentle non legato, which is adequate for all eighth-notes.²

Several ornaments appear in the score, some used consistently, others remaining local. The turn on the last note of the upper voice in m. 13 recurs in mm. 27 and 45. In all cases, it begins on the upper neighbor, contains

¹See, e.g., the written-out inverted mordent on the first beats of mm. 7-11. If played in the same touch as the surrounding 16th-notes, the middle notes of these ornaments might appear as belonging to the melodic line in the hidden two-part structure, while the melodically relevant tone is actually the main note of this mordent, the measures' second 16th-note.

²The only exception, owed to a particular convention, occurs in m. 16 and correspondingly in m. 48. Scalar runs in 16th-notes launched from an eighth-note were a standard figure of the era and always played with their legato including the initial longer value.

four notes and must be played fast particularly in front of the octave displacement of its resolution (e.g., as a 32nd-note triplet plus 16th-note). In two cases, the same cadential formula is additionally embellished. In m. 45, there is a mordent on the third 16th-note, enhancing the virtuoso character of the piece. It can easily be integrated, again as a 32nd-note triplet. Performers may consider transferring this mordent to the corresponding note in m. 13. The additional turn in m. 26, on the other hand, occurs in a surrounding of melodic eighth-notes not adorned elsewhere. Playing it underscores the prelude's playful side but obscures the parallels of the two hands. If included, this turn begins on the main pitch and encompasses five regular notes. The cadence concluding the first section also features two ornaments. Both the accented bass note of the V^7 chord and the final I carry inverted mordents. In the corresponding cadential close in mm. 47-48, the first of the two ornaments is omitted. If played in m. 15, it should also be added here. As to the pitches of the lower neighboring notes, only the D in m. 16 requires an artificially raised leading note since the modulation has brought us to the key of D major. All other inverted mordents use notes from the G-major scale.

Finally, there are four purely melodic ornaments. Three are taken up by the inverted mordent that enhances the E in m. 32 and its two sequences. All are meaningful ingredients both with regard to the character and the structural clarity of the piece. The fourth, a mordent in m. 20, is also very listener-friendly: it emphasizes a new beginning within the otherwise almost confusingly long chain of eighth-notes unfolding before the background pedal in the hidden second part.

Thematically the prelude is based on several homophonically conceived units with a distinct texture. Three of these models define the first two of the prelude's three sections. Model 1 consists of two pedals: a sustained pedal on the first scale degree and a repeated indirect pedal D on the weak beats of the hidden two-part structure in the other voice. In between, there are two lines moving in eighth-notes: one is written in eighth-note values, while the other forms the melodic strand of the hidden two-part structure. These lines move in parallel sixths. In the ensuing measures, the model recurs in a mixture of sequence and imitation: The sustained pedal and the repeated indirect pedal have exchanged hands, as have the same two lines in eighth-notes, which now move in compound thirds, the inversion of parallel sixths. When Model 1 recurs in mm. 17-22, the two pedal notes sound in octaves. The third recurrence of M1 inverts the perfect-fifth interval of the pedal notes so that they form compound fourths. As if slightly uneasy with this interval, the pedals move from measure to measure (see mm. 37-40:

D/G, E/G-E/A, F \sharp /A-F \sharp /B, G/B). The parallel eighth-note lines are in compound thirds but display small irregularities owing to the shift from measure to measure.

Model 2 is similar in texture (see L: from m. 7, U: from m. 8). Once again there are one or two pedal notes providing a backdrop for melodic parallels. While the pedal pitches are enlivened by a written-out inverted mordent on the downbeat, the melodic parallels now start out from a quarter-note before resuming their eighth-note motion. When the pattern recurs in mm. 23-24, the left-hand part is considerably changed. The closing measures of each section develop from the previous four strands through three strands (with only one pedal) to a two-part texture without any pedal-note layer. Although they share few surface details, their analogous textural development earns them the label “Model 3.”

At the beginning of the third section, Bach adds two further models. Model 4 (mm. 29-30, partial sequence in 31-32₁) combines the repeated pedal with eighth-note lines whose parallel is only a hint. Model 5 (U: from m. 32, L: from m. 33) is the only component in this prelude to present some polyphonic independence of voices.

To sum up, the prelude’s structural layout can be depicted as follows:

<i>section I</i>	<i>section II</i>	<i>section III</i>
M1	M1	M4
M1	M1	M5
M2	M2	M1
M3	M3	M3
cadential close	cadential close	cadential close

WTC II/15 in G major - Fugue

All who think they know what to expect of Bach’s fugues will be surprised by this subject, which is unusual both in its extremely regular rhythm and in its non-melodic pitch pattern. An uninterrupted string of 16th-notes spans way beyond the confines of the subject itself and, were it not for the harmonic “full stop” reached with the return to the tonic at m. 6₁, would leave the listener at a complete loss.

The subject, then, is exactly five measures long, the upbeat with five 16th-notes being complemented by the final note. Each measure presents a broken chord pattern. In fact, the interval pattern contains only a single second (see mm. 2-3), and even this is not perceived as a melodic step.

While mm. 1 and 2 play within the tonic chord, m. 3 along with the first harmonic shift establishes a figurative pattern that is sequenced in mm. 4 and 5. No subphrasing is needed or even desirable in this virtuoso play of broken chords. The harmonic outline describes an active step mm. 2 to 3,



thus enhancing the outset of the above-mentioned sequence. The dynamic line can only follow the simple layout expressed

in harmony and pitch. The result is a two-measure increase up to m. 3₁, followed by a gradual decrease to the final note.

The fugue comprises only six subject statements:

1	mm. 1-6 ₁	U	4	mm. 33-38 ₁	L
2	mm. 8-13 ₁	M	5	mm. 40-45 ₁	U
3	mm. 15-20 ₁	L	6	mm. 65-70 ₁	M

Apart from the adjustment of the first interval in the answer, the subject remains unchanged throughout the fugue. It never appears in either inversion or stretto.

Bach invents two counter-subjects for this fugue and uses them very regularly albeit with some variation. CS1 is introduced against the subject's answer (U: mm. 8-13). In its original shape it consists of a five-16th-note upbeat followed by slower note values in an overall descent including two syncopations. It ends in m. 13, in the weak position on the third 16th-note where the suspended E resolves indirectly into F#. CS1 accompanies all further subject statements. It recurs in M: mm. 15-20 in a simplified pattern: the descent seems as if cleaned, i.e., freed of all ornaments and escape notes, and the final resolution occurs at m. 20₁. In M: mm. 33-38 the initial 16th-note run is replaced by a dotted-note group, and in mm. 40-41 the upbeat is moved to another voice (L instead of M). Finally in U: mm. 65-70 the main rhythmic pattern is substituted by a chain of suspended notes, with the last broken into a chord. Only the descending direction may still remind listeners of the original CS1.

CS2 is introduced in mm. 16-20, i.e., against the subject's third statement. Entering one measure late, it is characterized by a group consisting of a syncopation followed by a fifth leap down to a pair of rising 16th-notes. The little group is sequenced twice in descending direction. The final syncopation resolves belatedly on the weak beat after the completion

of the subject (just as the final note of CS1 had done 7 measures earlier). CS2 accompanies the following two subject statements but is absent in the final entry. In the course of its two further entries it, too, is slightly varied: the one-measure rest before the belated beginning is filled in with 16th-notes (see U: mm. 33-34 and L: mm. 40-41), and the ending is diverted (see U: mm. 37-38 and L: mm. 44-45).

In view of so consistent a use of the contrapuntal material, it may come as a surprise that, upon closer inspection, these counter-subjects are found lacking a crucial quality

required in true polyphony: they are not independent of the subject's pitch pattern but actually ornamented parallels! The examples show the subject with its two companions as found in mm. 15-20, first in Bach's setting and then in skeletal simplification revealing the dependency, which extends to the dynamic design.

In this fugue, each subject entry is separated from the subsequent one. There are thus as many episodes as there are subject statements.

E1	mm. 6-8 ₁	E4	mm. 38-40 ₁
E2	mm. 13-15 ₁	E5	mm. 45-65 ₁
E3	mm. 20-33 ₁	E6	mm. 70-72

Bach has invented three episode motifs. The first is introduced between the *dux* and the *comes*. It is related to the beginning of CS1, which it thus anticipates (U: mm. 6-7₁ ≈ mm. 8-9₁) and recurs in similar function in E2 and E4 as well as varied in E3a. The two other motifs are derived from the subject. Ms1 (L: mm. 22-25₁ ≈ mm. 1-3₁) dominates the ten-measure E3b, Ms2 (L: mm. 45-47₁ ≈ mm. 3, 4, 5) the even longer E5a. The two episode motifs are accompanied by remotely analogous companions.

The two long episodes E3 and E5 are subdivided by D-major cadences whose melodic closing formulas in mm. 22-23 and 61-62 suggest section endings. The harmonic development on the inner sides of these cadences is

fascinating insofar as the second is designed as a free retrograde of the first: in E3b the imitations of Ms1 are in D major, G major, E major, A minor, and B major. In near mirror symmetry the imitations of Ms2 in E5a pass through B minor, E major, A minor, D major, G major, D major, and G major. The only episodes not to be characterized by motifs but by runs are E5b and E6. They affirm the fugue's virtuoso character by doubling its so far fastest note values.

The tempo chosen for this very lively fugue may be fast, limited only by the performer's technical skills to produce crystal-clear and very regular 32nd-notes in the runs and trills. The relative tempo of the prelude to this fugue sounds and looks simple: an eighth-note in the prelude corresponds with an eighth-note in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: prelude beats = 108, fugue beats = 72.) The actual effect for the listener is, however, one resembling a hemiola: $\underline{1} \underline{2} \underline{3} \underline{4} \underline{5} \underline{6}$ in one measure of the prelude turns into $\underline{1} \underline{2} \underline{3} \underline{4} \underline{5} \underline{6}$ in two fugal measures. The corresponding articulation requires a light quasi-legato touch for the 16th-notes and a detached but not too short non legato for the eighth-notes and quarter-notes. There are two exceptions. The first occurs in the two eighth-notes that Bach explicitly marks staccato (mm. 10 and 12): they should be distinguished from the surrounding non legato by particular lightness. The second appears in suspended notes that create harmonic tension awaiting a resolution. Just like appoggiatura-resolution pairs, these may under no circumstances be separated but must be played in tight legato (U: mm. 20-22; M: mm. 25, 27, 29, and 31; U+M: m. 38, U: m. 39, and U: mm. 65-69).

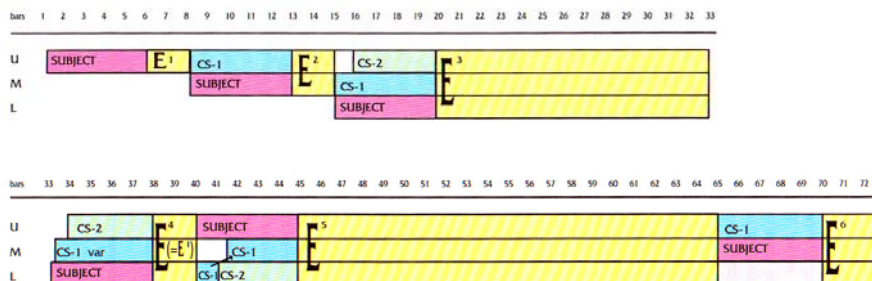
The fugue features five kinds of ornaments. The two inverted mordents in mm. 10 and 12 pose no problem. In the two trills in mm. 50 and 52, the ornamented note finds no harmonic or melodic resolution. As a result, the trill does not end in a suffix but stops short before the bar line. Both trills begin on the upper neighbor and shake in 32nd-notes. Each trill thus contains 12 notes the last of which is tied to the following downbeat. The three trills with suffix and resolution in mm. 57, 59, and 61 begin like the other trills on the upper auxiliary and end after five shakes in the suffix indicated by Bach. The mordent in m. 62 is approached stepwise and therefore begins on the main note. Its rhythm is a 32nd-note triplet. Lastly, the final note in the upper voice is preceded by a grace note. This C represents an appoggiatura that, played on the beat together with the notes of the middle and lower voices, resolves onto B after one eighth-note.

The entering order of the voices together with the design of the episodes and the harmonic organization of the piece add up to a clear picture of the fugue's structural layout. The six subject entries appear in two complete

rounds: U M L and L U M. The episodes also appear as 3 + 3. In the first half of the piece there are two two-measure episodes (E1 and E2) which have no other purpose than to link subsequent entries. They are complemented by the long and complex E3. In the second half of the piece, E4 corresponds with E1 in length, material, and purpose, while the long episode, rather than following the third subject entry, now precedes it for a more powerful closing effect. The final episode is again two measures long and thus completes the analogy.

The first group of subject statements relates to the home key, with entries in G, D, and G major. The entries in mm. 33-38 and 40-45 are in E minor (the tonic relative) and B minor (the dominant relative). The change of mode marks the beginning of a new section. The final entry returns to D major and concludes the second section on the tonic.

The dividing line between the two sections is somewhat hidden. One might wonder whether Bach did not want the entire fugue to appear as one virtuoso gesture, without too much obvious structuring. The cadence that concludes the first section in E minor in mm. 33-34 overlaps with the beginning of the second section and thus allows not the slightest breathing—either for the performer or for the listeners.



The development of tension in this fugue mirrors the work's structural simplicity. The three subject statements in the first section represent a gradual dynamic increase, due both to the growing ensemble and the rising intensity within the two linking episodes. The tension decreases slightly in the cadential close of E3a, only to rise again in the ascending sequences of E3b. The relaxation at the end of this episode is short and incomplete, so that the second section begins on a very elevated level. (A change of color in the minor-mode portion may be expressed more effectively by means of touch and articulation than through dynamics.)

In the second section, the first two entries are linked once more by the dynamically increasing motif derived from the counter-subject. At the same time, the choice of voices (L, U) and the extension of the pitch range to the highest octave available on Bach's keyboard instruments support another growth in tension. After this climactic moment, the long E5a with its descending sequences brings about a gradual relaxation. Although the brief E5b presents a powerful rush upward, the final subject statement enters on a much softer note, owing mainly to its relatively weak position in the middle of the texture and its reduced polyphonic density, as it is surrounded by a simplified CS1 and an accompanying bass instead of CS2. The concluding cadence and particularly the appoggiatura in the final measure confirm the soft ending.

This playful fugue thus presents itself dynamically in a design that is as simple as it is capturing:

U E1 M E2 L E3a E3b L E4 U E5 M E6

