

## WTC II/18 in G# minor – Prelude

The predominant texture in this prelude is homophonic. Motifs in one hand are supported by an accompaniment pattern in the other. Within this setting, there is hardly any inversion of voices or contrapuntal interplay. Apart from a few measures that display imitation, the laws of polyphony do not apply here, and the term “motif” is understood as denoting a single-voiced but non-meandering unit.

The prelude carries two verbal indications that draw attention. The use of the terms *piano* and *forte* in mm. 3 and 5 is an unusual sight in Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier* and leaves many interpreters wondering, especially since neither of them is taken up in the remaining 45 measures of the piece. One way of reading these dynamic indications is as a hint that this prelude was written for performance on a keyboard instrument with registers (such as the harpsichord).<sup>1</sup> Whether or not that was implied, it is beyond doubt that Bach wished mm. 3-4 to sound as an echo of mm. 1-2. This second interpretation, as the more basic one, should definitely be taken as a guide, regardless of the particular instrument on which the piece is performed.

Each of the initial four measures is harmonically conceived as i-V-i. These are not structurally relevant cadences. The same holds true for m. 5, which features all steps necessary for a modulation but because of the rest in m. 6<sub>1</sub> does not qualify as a section ending. That is reached soon afterwards, in the cadential close of mm. 7-8<sub>1</sub>, where the key of the dominant is successfully established.

The prelude comprises four sections, two of which are subdivided.

Ia	mm. 1-8 <sub>1</sub>	i-v	G# minor to D# minor
Ib	mm. 8-16 <sub>1</sub>	v	D# minor to A# major/D# major
II	mm. 16-24	v	dominant confirmed, Picardy-third close
IIIa	mm. 25-36 <sub>1</sub>	V-VII	D# major to F# major
IIIb	mm. 36-41 <sub>1</sub>	VII-i	F# major to D# major seventh/G# major
IV	mm. 41-50	i-i	tonic confirmed

There are three structural correspondences: mm. 3-4 ≈ 41-42 (varied), mm. 8-11<sub>3</sub> ≈ 36-39<sub>3</sub> (transposed), and mm. 11<sub>3</sub>-13<sub>3</sub> ≈ 34-35 (transposed).

<sup>1</sup>The first interpretation entails a register plan throughout the piece in order to convey what might have been Bach’s idea beyond the very scarce indication of mm. 3 and 5. This requires specialized knowledge about early keyboard instruments.

Since the rhythm is simple and the pitch pattern includes many large intervals, the basic character of this prelude is lively. The articulation requires 16th-notes in light legato touch and non-legato eighth-notes. The fact that Bach slurs the eighth-note pairs in mm. 9 and 10 as well as the similarly built pairs in mm. 37 and 38 indicates something beyond non-separation. These are characteristic appoggiatura-resolution pairs, a quality that, without the slurs, might have been easy to overlook in the complex harmonic setting of these measures. Not only should such pairs under all circumstances be rendered legato, the slurs add a sense of weighty–light. The similar slurs in mm. 44–45 serve to distinguish metrically analogous but harmonically different groups: on beat 2, the appoggiatura is to be linked to its resolution, while beat 4 features two sixths belonging to the same harmony which must be detached.<sup>2</sup>

The tempo of the prelude is flowing: fast enough to allow listeners to hear swiftly moving quarter-notes, but not so rushed as to convert the 16th-notes into virtuoso runs. The appoggiaturas that are distinguishing features in the prelude must retain some of their “sighing” quality. Ornaments include the grace-notes and two trills. All grace-notes appear as eighth-notes preceding quarter-notes. The value of the main note is thus split into equal halves, with the appoggiatura on the beat (mm. 2, 4, 17, 31, and 42). The trills embellish 16th-notes that form part of written-out ornamental patterns (U: m. 18, M: m. 19). They are therefore nothing but suffixless mordents, beginning on the upper neighbor note and comprising four 64th-notes.

Both the structure of the prelude and its dynamic layout are primarily influenced by the succession of motifs. Meanwhile, orientation for a large-scale design is provided by several indirect lines. Thus the first three of the prelude’s four sections are strung together by consistent overall descents in the outer voices. In section I, the bass moves gingerly downward over 1½ octaves, slowly at first, then picking up speed in diatonic steps followed by more closely spaced chromatic steps, only to rise again in consecutive fourths. Similar though even more pronounced processes can be detected in section III (l.h. from m. 25, r.h. from m. 36) where extended chromatic descents even create rhythmic patterns. Section II is more static with merely a few bass-note lines. In the fourth section are such lines of no consequence. The example shows this with an excerpt from the first three sections:

<sup>2</sup>Further pairs of appoggiatura-resolution do, however, exist—unmarked!—in the right-hand part of mm. 16 (B–A#), 24 (G#–F\* and C\*–D#), 40 (E–D# and G#–F\*), 43 (E–D#), and 50 (A#–G# and C#–B) and should be played accordingly. Appoggiaturas written in the form of grace-notes do not, of course, pose a problem of articulation since they are always legato.

The image displays a musical score for G# minor, measures 1 through 40. The score is divided into four systems:

- System I:** Measures 1 to 15, bass clef. It features a 16th-note line in the treble and a bass line with a repeated pedal point.
- System II:** Measures 16 to 24, bass clef. It shows variations of the M1 motif.
- System III:** Measures 25 to 35, bass clef. It continues the development of the motifs.
- System IV:** Measures 36 to 40, treble clef. It shows the right-hand part of the M3 motif.

This brings us to the motifs characterizing this prelude. M1 is a two-bar unit with three elements. In m. 1, a 16th-note line accompanied by two metrically placed chords describes a twofold curve in the treble. The line's long descent into the bass register splits into a hidden two-part structure consisting of a typical bass pattern below a repeated pedal. In m. 2, "new" treble voices present two "sigh motifs" in double thirds. The resulting impression of a three-strand texture should be underlined: there are the block chords, the 16th-notes, and the little melodic gestures. M1 is then repeated (according to Bach: as an echo), with the sigh motifs in inverted voices as parallel sixths. Variations of M1 can also be found in mm. 16-17, 41-42, and 43-44. In all three cases, the accompanying chords are replaced by melodic figures based on segments of the other two M1 elements.

M2 is introduced in mm. 5-7. In its accompaniment, it is related to M1. The melodic double notes are also taken up, together with their particular metric organization. The double notes describe what appears like an incomplete one-bar curve. Beginning with a written-out inverted mordent followed by a sudden leap, they embark on a descent that seems to prepare a conclusion on the next downbeat. Yet the expectation is deceived twice before the sequence finally reaches its goal (see m. 8<sub>1</sub>). Dynamically the three measures describe a gentle descent in which the escaping sixth leaps should sound as "charms," i.e., softer than their surroundings. M2 recurs once, without its second sequence and, more importantly, without the final resolution (see mm. 21-22).

M3 consists of two contrapuntally conceived voices. M3a, the lower part, spans a single measure (m. 8). M3b, the right-hand part, begins after beat 2 and ends in the following measure with the above-mentioned slurred

appoggiatura-resolution pair. M3 is sequenced in falling direction in mm. 9 and 10 and recurs, in inverted voices, in mm. 36-38, where it is followed by a longer extension leading right up to the end of this section in m. 40.

In addition, Bach invents a half-measure sequence model. It concludes section I and recurs in section III. Labeled “x” here in contradistinction to the motifs, it counters the preceding protracted descent in the bass with an ascent (m. 11: D#-E#-F\*, m. 12: G#-A#-B#, C#-D#-E#, m. 13: F#-G#-A#, B), and the preceding gradual diminuendo with a forceful crescendo, before leading to the cadential close in m. 15.

The following table shows the distribution of the material in the four sections as well as the crucial dynamic developments.

<i>Section I</i>				
mm. 1-2	3-4	5-7	8-11 <sub>3</sub>	11 <sub>3</sub> -15
M1	M1	M2	M3	x + close
(f)	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>di – mi – nu – en – do</i>	<i>crescendo</i>
<i>Section II</i>				
mm. 16-17	18-20	21-22	23-24	
M1 var.	developmt.	M2	expansion + close	
<i>Section III</i>				
mm. 25-33	34-35	36-39 <sub>3</sub>	39 <sub>3</sub> -40	
developmt.	x	M3	expansion	
<i>dim.</i>	<i>cresc.</i>	<i>di – mi – nu – en – do</i>		
<i>Section IV</i>				
mm. 41-43		46-49		
M1 varied + expanded		development + close		

## WTC II/18 in G# minor – Fugue

Beginning on the downbeat of a 6/8 measure, the subject extends over four measures, ending at m. 5<sub>1</sub> where B, the third of the G# minor chord, concludes the first complete cadence. The phrase structure is perhaps the most striking feature in this subject, particularly since, as will be seen later, this structure serves as a model for several other components of the primary material. Remarkably, the subject’s second half is an almost exact sequence of the first half—an unusually simple pattern for the main thematic idea of a polyphonic composition. (The final note, in this light, seems almost like an aborted attempt to add yet more sequences.) This

structure, in conjunction with the extraordinary rhythmic simplicity, might cause the lulling effect of an ongoing *perpetuum mobile* if one subject statement were to follow another without interruption. Bach avoids this by separating all statements after the initial entry pair of subject and answer with contrasting secondary material.

Rhythmically, the subject itself consists exclusively of eighth-notes. Outside the subject, quarter-notes and dotted quarter-notes, i.e., note values that can be expected in any 6/8 time, predominate. Eventually, however, syncopations also become a frequent feature. This begins with long tied notes that can be identified as the beginning of large-scale closing formulas (mm. 5-6, 7-8). Soon thereafter, metric accents shift from the middle beat to the second or to the third eighth-notes and from the downbeat to the fifth or to the sixth eighth-note (see, e.g., mm. 9 + 10, 15-16, 17 + 18, and 45 + 46, respectively). Finally, Bach even adds some 16th-notes. These are found only rarely on the first two pages of the score (mm. 39 and 62) but more frequently from m. 71 onward.

The pitch pattern is equally ambiguous. The string of consecutive leaps at the subject's beginning (see mm. 1-2: A#-D#-D#-G#) is contrasted with a high percentage of chromaticism throughout the fugue. The harmonic background implied in the unaccompanied subject is straightforward: a simple progression is interspersed with ornamenting steps at the outset of each half. Bach's actual harmonization of the subject

i V<sup>7</sup> i iv<sup>6</sup> i iv<sup>6</sup> V<sup>7</sup> i  
(i - - - - - iv - - - - - V<sup>7</sup> i)

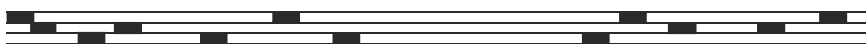
in the course of the fugue covers a wide range of alternatives. Apart from the final V-I, every chord is at some instance substituted by another cadential step. This gives the subject an uncanny versatility.

The dynamic shaping brings up the question of the relative melodic value of the eighth-notes: are all eighth-notes equal, i.e., on the same level of intensity, or can some of them be regarded as secondary? While this question certainly enters way into the sphere of individual interpretation, it is important that it be answered in detail as it influences many aspects, including that of conveying the phrase structure. A possible concept is the following: One can regard the sudden upward leaps in mm. 1 and 3 (the fifth eighth-notes each) as escape notes and the narrow wavy lines in mm. 2 and 4 as ornaments of a

simpler background. This unveils a “backbone” that allows both a singing style and subtle phrasing before the sequence. The corresponding dynamic entails two soft curves, the second slightly more exuberant than the first.

The principal subject—because what has been discussed so far later turns out to be one of two subjects in this fugue—is heard in twelve statements. The subject receives a real answer and suffers no modifications.

1. mm. 1- 5	U	7. mm. 55- 59	L
2. mm. 5- 9	M	8. mm. 97-101	L
3. mm. 13-17	L	9. mm. 103-107	U
4. mm. 19-23	M	10. mm. 111-115	M
5. mm. 33-37	L	11. mm. 125-129	M
6. mm. 45-49	U	12. mm. 135-139	U



From m. 61 onward, Bach introduces a second subject. It begins on the third eighth-note of the measure with a five-step chromatic descent, followed by a slightly more straightforward ascent back to the initial pitch before it concludes with a do–si–do formula in the traditional rhythmic pattern. Subject 2 thus contrasts in several ways with subject 1: Its rhythm is varied, the outstanding rhythmic features being the short–long, short–long of the chromatic segment and the dotted notes with syncopation in the closing formula. Furthermore, the ornament on the penultimate note adds faster movement. The pitch pattern is restricted to very small intervals: there is only one whole-tone step in an overwhelming surrounding of semitones. And in further contrast to subject 1, the phrase is inseparable, containing neither sequences nor other features that would invite or even permit sub-phrasing. All that subjects 1 and 2 share is the four-measure length and the fact that all entries are separated by episodes.

Despite its entry sixty measures into the fugue, subject 2 appears almost as frequently as subject 1: in altogether nine entries.

1. mm. 61-65	U	6. mm. 103-107	M
2. mm. 66-70	M	7. mm. 111-115	U
3. mm. 71-75	L	8. mm. 125-128	L
4. mm. 79-83	U	9. mm. 135-139	M
5. mm. 97-101	M		

Two of the statements of subject 2 are slightly changed in shape: in m. 83, the final resolution is reached only after a suspension and subsequent ornamentation of the leading-note, whereas in m. 128, subject 2 already breaks off on this leading-note.

Both subjects are accompanied by their own companions, but neither of them proves to be very faithful. CS1 is introduced against the second entry of S1 (see m. 5 B# to m. 9<sub>1</sub> D#). Its structure is strikingly similar to that of the subject it accompanies: it consists of two subphrases, the second of which sequences the first. Each subphrase features the do–si–do formula Bach also uses in subject 2, together with a chromatic upbeat. The pitch pattern encompasses only semitones. Dynamic shaping in this counter-subject is unproblematic. In each subphrase, the eighth-note upbeat prepares the climax on the syncopation, which is resolved throughout the formula. CS1 recurs only once (see mm. 19–23). CS2 is presented together with S2 (see L: mm. 61–65). Like its leader it is indivisible. Apart from a syncopation with subsequent written-out inverted mordent, CS2 features only eighth-notes and a not very distinct melodic pattern. This counter-subject recurs twice: In mm. 66–70, where the beginning is completely changed, it imitates the original only from the last eighth-note of m. 67 onward. In mm. 71–75, by contrast, only the first measure is modified in such a way that the characteristic syncopation followed by an inverted mordent now appears twice instead of just once. An intriguing fact about these two main counter-subjects is that CS1 is distinctly related to subject 2 while, upon close in-

spection, CS2 is related to subject 1. Besides the coincidences in pitch, CS1 features some of the short–long patterns from S2 while CS2 like S1 is characterized by eighth-note motion. Hence this is a fugue with two main thematic ideas.

At the outset of the composition, one dominates and is accompanied by the other; later, the second idea dominates and is accompanied by a variant of the first. From m. 97 onward they finally meet in their unique shapes.<sup>3</sup>

The image displays a musical score for a fugue in G# minor, showing four staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom two are in bass clef. The top staff is labeled CS1, the second S2, the third CS2, and the fourth S1. The music consists of eighth-note patterns with syncopations and chromatic upbeats. Dashed lines connect notes between staves to illustrate relationships: CS1 is related to S2, and CS2 is related to S1. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

<sup>3</sup>Two further S1 counter-subjects recur only once each in considerably altered shape; they thus exert no real impact on the polyphonic design of the fugue. Both combine do–si–do formulas with eighth-note runs, thus mixing elements of both primary components.

The fugue encompasses fifteen subject-free passages.

E1	mm. 9-12	E9	mm. 75-79 <sub>1</sub>
E2	mm. 17-18	E10	mm. 83-96
E3	mm. 23-32	E11	mm. 101-102
E4	mm. 37-44	E12	mm. 107-110
E5	mm. 49-54	E13	mm. 115-124
E6	mm. 59-61 <sub>1</sub>	E14	mm. 129-134
E7	mm. 65-66 <sub>1</sub>	E15	mm. 139-143
E8	mm. 70-71 <sub>1</sub>		

Among the material used in the episodes are components from the subjects and counter-subjects,<sup>4</sup> several independent motifs, and traditional closing formulas. The line between motifs derived from primary material and those invented exclusively for use in episodes is somewhat blurred, particularly where later variations of originally independent motifs end up resembling segments of a subject or counter-subject. Moreover, several of the motifs are related among themselves, and the designation of one as a “modification” or as “new” may seem arbitrary. The list given below, while aiming at the highest degree of transparency possible in so complex a piece, tries to mention further links wherever applicable.

Independent motifs—motifs apparently invented specifically for the use in episodes and not derived from primary material—are introduced in the first two subject-free passages and determine all others. Oddly, M1 and M3 anticipate CS2 while M2 and M4 act as forerunners of S2 itself. M5 alone seems at first to be entirely independent of the fugue’s primary thematic material, but this too is as if debunked in later variations.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The final 8 eighth-notes of S1 are quoted in U: mm. 37-39<sub>1</sub> and imitated in M: mm. 39-41<sub>1</sub>. Both quotes are accompanied by the second subphrase of CS1 (see M: mm. 37-39<sub>1</sub>; U: mm. 39-41<sub>1</sub>). This material builds E4a, which ends with a cadential close in B major at m. 41<sub>1</sub>. In E14, only the final 6 eighth-notes of S1 appear, but all the more frequently (see L: mm. 128-129, M: mm. 129-130, U: 130-131, M: mm. 132-133, and L: 134-135). The ending of CS1 is considerably shortened here and dropped after only one occurrence (see U: mm. 129-130). S2 material is heard in two versions: as a chromatic descent (taken from the initial six notes of S2, see M: mm. 115-116 and L: mm. 117-118) and as an ascent of one whole and two half steps (derived from the five rising notes of S2, see U: mm. 83-84, M: mm. 84-85, and L: mm. 85-86, 86-87, 87-88, 88-89). CS2 appears twice as an extending sequence (see in E7: L mm. 65-66, and in E8 varied: U mm. 70-71). Later on, the entire second half of CS2 (i.e., its final twelve eighth-notes) is quoted in E13 (see U: mm. 123-125). This recurrence is accompanied by the shared ending of CS1 and S2 (see L: third eighth-note m. 123 to 125<sub>1</sub>).

<sup>5</sup>For M1 see U: mm. 9-10<sub>1</sub>, for M2 see M: mm. 9-10<sub>1</sub>, for M3 see M: mm. 17-18<sub>1</sub>, and for M4 see L: mm. 17-18<sub>1</sub>. M5 is introduced in U: mm. 17-19<sub>1</sub> and continued with a chromatic variant from U: mm. 107-109<sub>1</sub> onward.



Three of the episodes are distinguished from the remaining ones by the fact that they feature motifs that appear nowhere else in the fugue. As these three episodes are at the same time the longest subject-free passages, this observation certainly deserves attention. The components are: in E3, a syncopation followed by five eighth-notes (L: mm. 26-27, M: mm. 27-28, and L: mm. 28-29), in E10, two consecutive syncopations with upbeat and subsequent mordent (U: mm. 85-87<sub>1</sub>, M: mm. 86-88<sub>1</sub>, U: mm. 87-89<sub>1</sub>, and M: mm. 88-90) and the figure characterized by a “slide” in 16th-notes (U: mm. 90-91, M: mm. 91-92, and L: mm. 92-93), and in E13, a three-note ascent with artificial leading-notes (U: mm. 119-120, M: mm. 119-120, U: mm. 120-121, M: mm. 120-121, and U: mm. 121-122).

The role each of the fifteen episodes plays in the dynamic development of the fugue can be described as follows: E6 and E15 are nothing but elaborate cadential closes, extending the preceding subject statements without any color contrast and bringing forth an immediate and complete relaxation. E4a, E7, E8, and E14 evolve from the subject entries preceding them by way of imitation or sequence. They, too, do not bring forth a color contrast but just a gradual relaxation. The three long episodes (E3, E10, and E13) describe self-contained curves. They all begin with an increase of tension followed by an extended decrease and a final relaxation underpinned by a cadential close. The remaining episodes (E1, E2, E4b, E5, E9, E11, and E12) are short and display independent material. E1, E2, E5, and E9 are determined by descending sequences, while the others, particularly E11 and E12, display rising lines. Besides their individual increases or decreases, all these episodes establish a color contrast to the surrounding subject statements.

In this fugue, the main subject with its simple rhythm and restricted melodic expression can be dangerously deceiving with regard to the work's mood, misleading performers into too swift and light-paced a mood. The complexity of the overall rhythmic pattern and the high content of chromatic lines and altered notes do in fact indicate a rather calm basic character. The tempo should express the compound meter in the manner of a very moderate half-measure pulse.

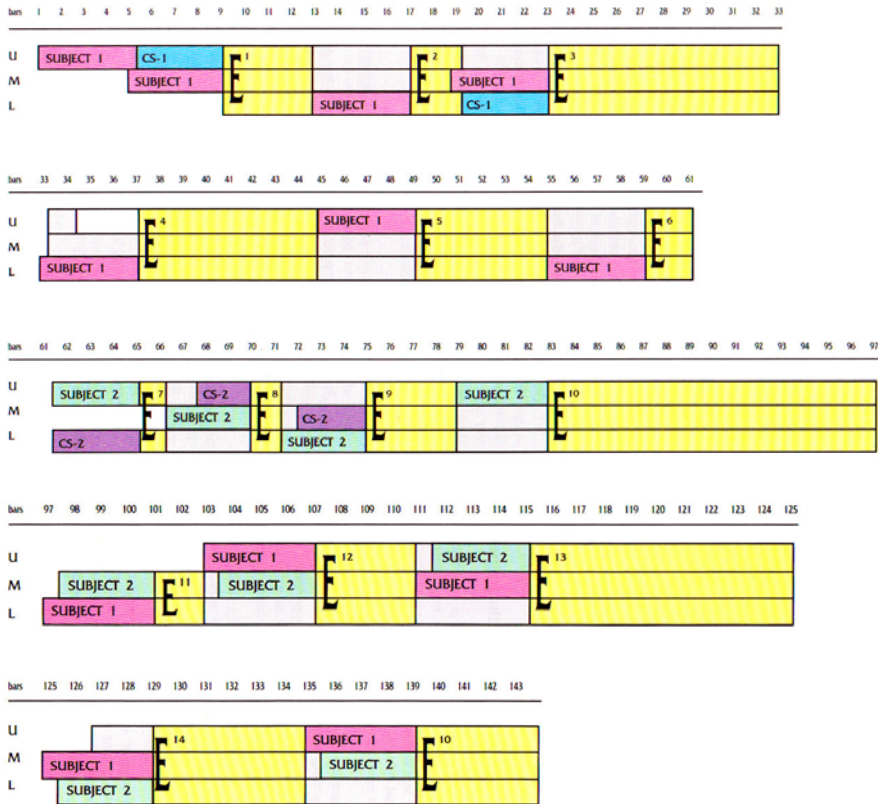
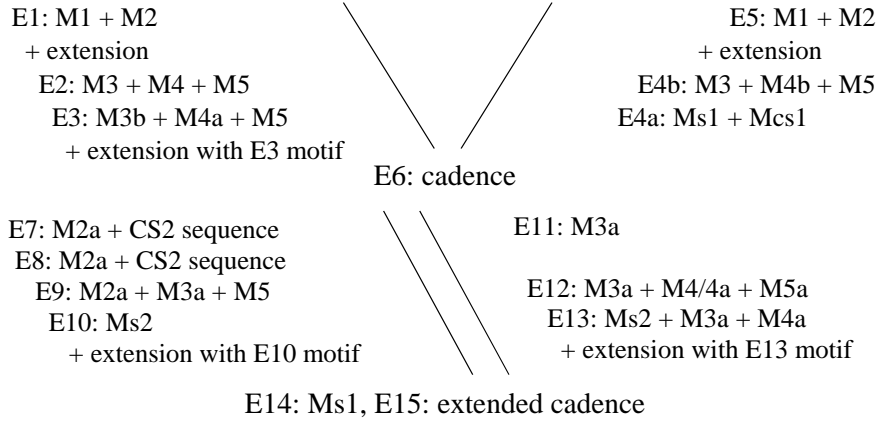
The relative tempo of the prelude to the fugue sets the larger beats into proportion, thus providing enough variation on the surface with 16th-notes in one, triplet eighth-notes in the other piece: a quarter-note (a beat) in the prelude corresponds with a dotted quarter-note (half a measure) in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: 76 for the quarter-notes in the prelude and the dotted quarter-notes in the fugue.)

The articulation corresponding with this character demands legato for all melodic notes. Exceptions occur in cadential-bass patterns and consecutive leaps (see, e.g., L: mm. 28, 40-41, 54-55, 112-113, 114, 136-137, and 142-143). Owing to the high density of relatively short motifs in this composition, the legato touch is frequently interrupted by phrasing, which in almost all cases comes with both dynamic shaping and a gentle cut in the sound flow.

The fugue features several ornaments requiring detailed planning. Among the primary material, S2 is embellished with a cadential trill before the final note. This trill is approached stepwise and thus begins on the main note. For the speed of its shakes, 16th-notes seem most reasonable (a choice which, one should be aware, gives all written-out 16th-note groups in this piece the value of ornaments). The trill ends in a suffix that touches the major sixth of the current scale. Bach indicates the trill in m. 64. In m. 69 it was apparently added later. For all we know, the same trill would have been expected in mm. 74 (L), 100 (M), 106 (M), 114 (U), and 138 (M). Only in mm. 128 where the subject breaks off early, and in m. 82 where the resolution of the leading-note is delayed, is a trill redundant. (In m. 82, a complementary ornamental figure actually appears in the middle voice.) Two further trills are indicated for notes outside the thematic material. In mm. 30 and 60, the lower voice carries whole-measure ornaments which both begin on the main note and end with a suffix.

The structural layout of the G#-minor fugue is evident from both the entering order of the two subjects and the design and material of the episodes. Yet while the facts concerning the number and extension of sections are quickly explained, it is intriguing to observe Bach's detailed and artful use of secondary means for creating balance. The fugue encompasses five sections. The first two are determined by subject 1. Both conclude with a redundant entry (see section I: U M L M and section II: L U L) followed by a cadential close (mm. 31-33<sub>1</sub> and mm. 59-61<sub>1</sub> respectively). In section III, subject 2 repeats the entering order of the fugue's exposition but ends with the redundant statement in another voice (U M L U). This section, too, closes with a perfect cadence (mm. 96-97<sub>1</sub>). Sections IV and V are then dedicated to the juxtaposition of the two subjects. The cadential close in mm. 123-125<sub>1</sub> separates these sections. Sections II, III, IV, and V all begin with the three-part ensemble reduced to two parts by one resting voice.

Bach's mastery of balance is apparent particularly in the subtle play of analogy and symmetry in the episodes. The following summary focuses only on the structurally relevant details.



In the absence of any tension-enhancing features such as strettos or parallel entries, minor/major contrasts, or varying contrapuntal density, large-scale developments of tension seem less indicated than careful color contrasts between subject-determined measures and episodes. Within each section, the dynamic level of the consecutive subject entries increases slightly. This is due to different means in each case:

- In I the increase is engendered by the growing number of voices but weakened by the receding tendency of the linking episodes E1 and E2.
- In II the less powerful increase of the ensemble is supported by the use of primary material in E4a (interpreted by some analysts as a substitute for a fourth entry), but is again counter-balanced by the decreasing gesture of E5.
- In III the entries of the second subject's exposition are strung together by the two short episodes E7 and E8 that evolve from the subject statements by way of sequence and thus enable a longer stretch of a single color, uninterrupted by secondary material. The increase is, however, discontinued in E9 before the redundant entry.
- In IV the "exposition" of the subject juxtaposition is made similarly stringent by the two linking episodes with increasing tendency (E11 and E12). The only major-mode statement of subject 1 in the entire fugue adds further luster here and converts this statement pair into the climax of the composition.
- In V the use of S1-material in the linking episode avoids a color contrast between the two statement pairs, but the descending motion of E14 counter-acts any dynamic increase.