

WTC II/22 in B \flat minor – Prelude

The B \flat minor prelude is written in polyphonic three-part texture. Two motifs pervade the piece: one substantial, appearing much like a “theme,” the other short and versatile, including inversion and multiple sequential patterns. In view of the fact that the second entry of the principal thematic component occurs on the dominant, this prelude could be described as composed along the lines of a three-part fugue.

There are several distinct cadential patterns that indicate one aspect of the structure in this piece. The following six harmonic units emerge:

- I mm. 1-16₁ tonic to minor dominant (i-v), B \flat minor to F minor
- II mm. 16-24₁ back to the tonic (v-i), F minor to B \flat minor
- III mm. 24-42₁ on to the dom. relative (i-VII), B \flat minor to A \flat major
- IV mm. 42-55₁ to the subdominant (VII-iv), A \flat major to E \flat minor
- V mm. 55-70₁ back to the tonic (iv-i), E \flat minor to B \flat minor
- VI mm. 70-83 tonic confirmed (i-i), B \flat minor

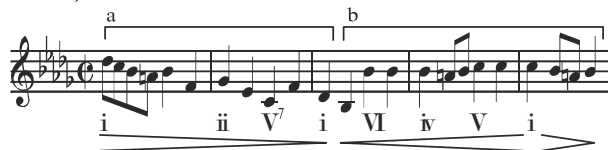
Two substantial analogies can be ascertained:

- mm. 1-16₁ \approx 55-70₁ transposed a fifth down, U + M inverted;
- mm. 36-40₂ \approx 77-81₂ each voice transposed and slightly varied

Given the *alla breve* meter, the simple rhythmic pattern dominated by eighth- and quarter-notes, and the broken-chord pattern characterizing the “subject,” the basic character of this piece is rather lively. The tempo may be very fluent. The half-note beats should be perceived as swinging but unhurried. Articulation combines a light legato touch in the eighth-notes with gentle non legato in the quarter-notes. Exceptions occur only in the do-si-do formulas, which must be legato (see L: mm. 1-3, M: 8-10, U: 14-16, etc.). No ornament is indicated in the score. It is, however, a good idea to add one embellishment that would have been understood as implied by any performer at Bach’s time. The dotted note on the middle beat of m. 82 represents, together with the anticipation of the resolving keynote, a typical closing formula. This was conventionally ornamented with a mordent. This mordent begins with the upper neighboring note B \flat and contains two fast shakes, stopping short before the end of the sixth eighth-note of the measure.

The subject of this “fugue” is introduced in the middle voice. With its extension of four and a half measures and its interesting phrase structure, it does not have to fear comparison with officially declared fugal subjects.

Its first subphrase [a] begins with a gentle curve in eighth-notes before it turns to quarter-notes. Reading the figure $D_b-C-B-A-B_b$ as “ D_b + turn figure on B_b ,” one recognizes that the whole subphrase consists of broken chords representing a complete harmonic progression: D_b-B_b-F , G_b-E_b-C , $F-D_b-(B_b)$. The harmonic progression ends at m. 3_1 . That the D_b ends the phrase despite marking the center of a broken triad will only become apparent in two later statements, in which the two subphrases are entrusted to different voices (see from m. 42-52: L/M, M/U). The overall descent in subphrase [a] is dynamically best represented in a continuous diminuendo. The second subphrase [b] begins with the rising octave leap followed by what could be described as an ornamentation of the simple group B_b-C-B_b . This segment is once again harmonized as a complete progression. The tension grows toward the last downbeat, to be released in the final ornamented resolution. (On the level of minute shaping, the crescendo evolves in two staggered increases, rising twice through the sequenced tripartite note repetitions and climaxing on the next downbeat’s appoggiatura before one brief and one longer relaxation).



There are altogether eight complete statements of the “subject.” In a few cases (marked below with an asterisk), the second subphrase seems extended. Harmonically, however, these extensions do not form part of the statements, and they are therefore not included in the table below. In two cases, as mentioned above, the two subphrases are given to different voices.

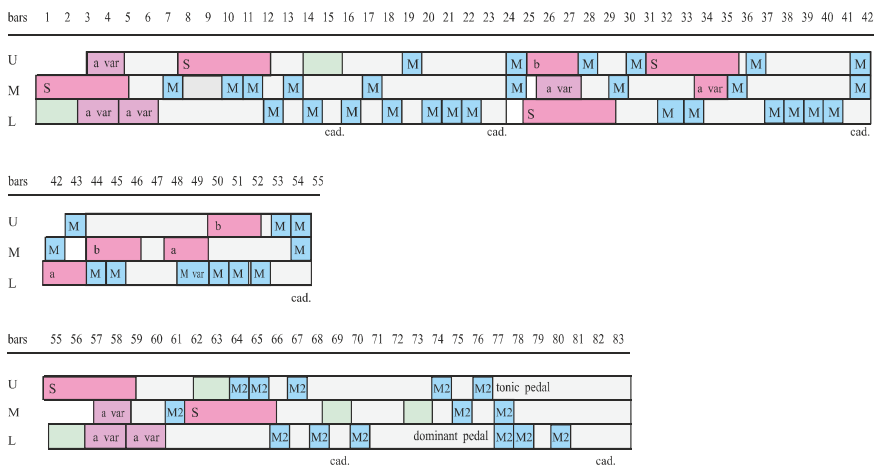
1. mm. 1-5 ₂	M	5. mm. 42-44 ₁ /44-46 ₂	L/M*
2. mm. 8-12 ₂	U	6. mm. 48-50 ₁ /50-52 ₂	M/U
3. mm. 25-29 ₂	L*	7. mm. 55-59 ₂	U
4. mm. 31-35 ₂	U*	8. mm. 62-66 ₂	M

In looking for recurring contrapuntal figures one finds that the first subphrase is accompanied by a do–si–do formula in the first two and last two entries of the “subject,” while the second subphrase is twice surrounded by two shortened, transposed, and varied versions of subphrase [a] (see the variation of M: mm. 1-3₁ in L: mm. 3-5₁ and in U: mm. 3₂-4₂; see also M + L: mm. 57-59₁ with mm. 55-57₁).

A second thematic component, serving as an independent motif in this “prelude in the style of a fugue,” is introduced in m: 7-8₁ as a link to the second statement of the “subject.” It describes an extensive upbeat to the

subsequent downbeat and is almost omnipresent, filling measures in which the subject remains silent as well as accompanying some of its entries. This motif appears in inversion (as in U: mm. 24-25₁, etc.), with variation of its opening or closing intervals (as in M: mm. 11-12₁ or L: mm. 16-17₁ and 20-21₁), and repeatedly builds juxtapositions in contrary motion (as in mm. 24-25₁, 41-42₁, 54-55₁, and 77-78₁). Structurally relevant in this composition are also the two pedals emerging in the final section (see the four-measure dominant pedal in L: mm. 73-75₁/75₂-77₁ followed by the nearly equally extensive tonic pedal in U: mm. 77-80₁).

When trying to describe the layout of the B \flat -minor prelude with the vocabulary established for the structure of a fugue, one detects a design in three sections. Section I in mm. 1-42₁ encompasses four statements in two pairs: M, U and L, U. The shorter section II in mm. 42-55₁ is distinguished by the two statements whose subphrases change voices. Section III in mm. 55-83 concludes the piece with two further intact entries in U and M and a passage with secondary material and the above-mentioned pedals.



WTC II/22 in B \flat minor – Fugue

Beginning on the downbeat of a measure in 3/2 time, the subject spans more than four measures—including three rests—before closing at m. 5₁. The contour displays predominantly small intervals interspersed with only two high-tension leaps: the tritones E \flat -A in m. 2 and G \flat -C in m. 4. The rhythm includes three different note values: half-, quarter-, and eighth-notes.

Of particular impact are the rests. All three are equal in duration and metric place: a quarter-note each falling on the first half of one of the weaker beats in a measure (see mm. 1₃, 2₃, and 4₂). These interruptions in the melodic flow raise a crucial question regarding the structure of the subject: Do all or only some of the rests mark the end of a subphrase? In the case of the first rest, this seems easy to answer. This silence cuts into an ascending line (A: mm. 1-2: B_♭-C-D_♭-E_♭). Complemented by a falling tritone and its resolution, which returns to the keynote B_♭, the ascent presents the first half of a perfect curve that exerts a strong unifying force. The rest in m. 1 thus has tension-sustaining function. Conversely, the silence following the return to the keynote in m. 2₃ marks a “breathing” point after the end of the first subphrase. Finally, the third case is ambiguous. On the one hand, the figure built by the three notes at the beginning of m. 4 depicts a releasing gesture and thus allows the consideration of another “breath.” On the other hand, mm. 3-4 can be identified as a varied sequence of the first subphrase, preceded by a quarter-note upbeat and augmented so as to extend into the quarter-note on the next downbeat:

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is labeled "Bach's subject" and the bottom staff is labeled "its 'skeleton'". Both are in 3/2 time and B-flat major. The skeleton staff has two annotations: "tritone + resolution" with arrows pointing to the notes G_♭ and F_♭ in measure 2, and another "tritone + resolution" with arrows pointing to the notes G_♭ and F_♭ in measure 4.

On the basis of this observation, the varied and partially augmented sequence could also be taken as a larger unit. In this case the rest in m. 4 would be interpreted as a second tension-sustaining rest.

The subject's harmonic background, although somewhat difficult to discern among the highly chromatic lines, can support both concepts. As the final entry in mm. 96-100 shows particularly clearly, the harmonization of the first subphrase is repeated in the second. Observing that Bach ends the first somewhat inconclusively with a major-mode tonic (i-ii-i-vii⁷-I) but concludes the reiteration of the progression in the minor-mode, one could argue for an external tail ([vii⁷] i-ii-i-vii⁷-i + vii⁷-V-I), although an internal extension ([vii⁷] i-ii-i-vii⁷ + i-vii⁷-V + I) may seem more likely.

The image shows a single staff of music with Roman numerals written below the notes. The numerals are: i, ii, i, vii⁷, I, vii⁷, i, ii, i, vii⁷, i, vii⁷, V⁷, i.

When we combine these findings—the layout in two corresponding subphrases and the relaxing gesture at the beginning of the fourth measure—into a dynamic interpretation, we arrive at the following concept:

- Within the first subphrase, the tension increases during the four-note ascent, finds its climax at m. 2₁ in a vii⁷ chord, and diminishes during the return to the keynote. As the note before the tension-sustaining rest is simple and straightforward in its direction toward the subsequent note, no interruption of the crescendo is desirable.
- Within the second subphrase, the tension rises similarly throughout the (ornamented) rise to the G \flat at m. 4₁, which is again harmonized by a vii⁷ chord. The rest, which occurs here not during the ascent but after the climax, is preceded by two ornamental notes. These present a small relaxation (on a secondary level) before the G \flat is picked up and a proper decline through the falling tritone and its (ornamented) resolution is launched.
- In the competition between the climaxes of the two subphrases, the second one tops the first: structurally, the G \flat is the peak of the slightly longer and more complex subphrase and lies in a rising sequence; melodically, it represents the sixth degree which, in all minor scales, holds particular tension as a semitone above the fifth.

The entries of the subject in this fugue follow an extremely regular pattern. There are altogether twenty-four statements:

1. mm. 1-5 ₁	A	13. mm. 67-71 ₁	T _{inv}
2. mm. 5-9 ₁	S	14. mm. 67 ₂ -71 ₂	S _{inv}
3. mm. 11-15 ₁	B	15. mm. 73-77 ₁	A _{inv}
4. mm. 17-21 ₁	T	16. mm. 73 ₂ -77 ₂	B _{inv}
5. mm. 27-31 ₁	T	17. mm. 80-84 ₁	S _{inv}
6. mm. 27 ₂ -31 ₂	A	18. mm. 80 ₂ -84 ₂	T
7. mm. 33-37 ₁	S	19. mm. 89-93 ₁	B
8. mm. 33 ₂ -37 ₂	B	20. mm. 89 ₂ -93 ₂	A _{inv}
9. mm. 42-46 ₁	T _{inv}	21. mm. 96-100 ₁	S
10. mm. 46-50 ₁	A _{inv}	22. mm. 96-100 ₁	A
11. mm. 52-56 ₁	S _{inv}	23. mm. 96 ₂ -99 ₂	T _{inv}
12. mm. 58-62 ₁	B _{inv}	24. mm. 96 ₂ -99 ₂	B _{inv}



The subject's real answer is either identical with the original (as in T: mm. 17-21) or differs only in its major-mode ending (as in S: mm. 5-9). Other modifications concern the shape of the phrase ending, extended into

a weak-beat (“female”) ending in three statements (see S: m. 9, B: m. 15, and S: m. 56) but shortened in the two final entries. Exactly half of the statements are inverted, and the focus on a symmetrical design is even further emphasized with regard to strettos and parallels:

- eight times does the subject appear uncoupled: four times in its original shape, four times in inversion;
- eight entries form simple strettos: four of them couple two original statements each, the other consist exclusively of inversions;
- four statements participate in mixed strettos made up of original and inverted entries;
- four statements sound in a combination of stretto and parallel.

Despite this extraordinary emphasis on the subject itself, Bach invents a regular counter-subject as well as, in lieu of a second counter-subject, another brief contrapuntal figure. CS1 is characterized by an interrupted chromatic ascent (mm. 5-7₁: A-B_b-B_b-C, C-D_b-D_b-E_b-E_b-F), complemented by an ornamented appoggiatura-resolution pair and, after another rest, its falling sequence. The descent with its two segments veiling a chromatic line (F-E_b, E_b-D_b) appears as symmetrical to the chromaticism in the earlier ascent. Regarding the phrase structure and its dynamic equivalent, there is thus a distinct contrast between the subject and its most prominent companion. The independence of CS1 from the subject is carried so far that the counter-subject regularly closes two or three quarter-note beats after the end of the subject (see, e.g., mm. 9, 15). CS1 faithfully accompanies each of the single uninverted subject statements. Its inversion, which remains incomplete, breaking off after the long note, supports each of the inverted entries (see A: mm. 42-45, T: mm. 46-49, A: mm. 52-54, and S: mm. 59-61). It makes a further short appearance in connection with the first mixed stretto (see A: mm. 82-83).

CS2 is a very unusual companion. Far shorter than the subject that it undertakes to accompany, it only materializes during the build-up to the subject’s second (and main) climax. But as if its very restricted scope was not strange enough, its pitch pattern is also entirely vague. The only consistent features are its rhythm and articulation: three quarter-notes, introduced with wedges and followed each by a quarter-note rest, lead to a final note of varying duration. More often than not, this note group is preceded by an upbeat. Nondescript as this may seem, CS2 is nevertheless a loyal companion. After its first presentation (see S: mm. 12-14) it recurs eight times, accompanying original and inverted entries, single statements and strettos alike.

The fugue encompasses thirteen subject-free passages. Owing to the fact that the endings of subject and counter-subject do not coincide and that strettos are so uncommonly frequent, there are several cases where primary and secondary material overlap.

E1 mm. 9-11 ₁	E6 mm. 50-52 ₁	E10 mm. 77-80 ₁
E2 mm. 15-17 ₁	E7 mm. 56-58 ₁	E11 mm. 84-89 ₁
E3 mm. 21-27 ₁	E8 mm. 62-67 ₁	E12 mm. 93-96 ₁
E4 mm. 31-33 ₁	E9 mm. 71-73 ₁	E13 mm. 100-101
E5 mm. 37-42 ₁		

The material used in the episodes includes partial sequences of subject and CS1 as well as independent episode motifs. Apart from E13 at the very end of the composition, no episode is conceived as a cadential close. Each of the motifs is limited to a single episode. Two are hybrids, insofar as they can be traced back to more than one component. E12 is dominated by CS1 (see S/A: mm. 93-95), while E3 features a figure derived from a mixture of the two counter-subjects (see B: mm. 21-22 from G to B \flat , as well as mm. 22-23, 23-24). One independent motif is introduced and imitated in E6 (see A: mm. 50-51 from A \flat to D \flat , T: mm. 51-52 from C to F), a second one in E8 (see A: mm. 62-63 from E \flat to F, S: mm. 63-64 from B \flat to B \flat ; similarly S/A: mm. 64-66₁, and S: mm. 66-67₁).

This fugue is conceived in basically calm character. Although the 3/2 time signature indicates that each of the half-notes represents an undivided beat, these beats should swing in a stately manner. The tempo proportion between the prelude and the fugue is a complex one. It can be attained in either of two translation processes: one can equate two measures in the prelude with a single measure in the fugue, or convert an assumed triplet quarter-note in the prelude into an eighth-note in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: half-notes in the prelude = 88, half-notes in the fugue = 66.)

The basic articulation in this fugue is legato. Several exceptions do, however, occur: In the subject's first subphrase, Bach has marked the unornamented ascent with wedges indicating an energetic abbreviation of each note. Although the markings are not consistently repeated throughout the composition, the same approach should be used in all further entries of the subject. CS2 equally carries wedges on three of its few notes. These seem particularly telling since they precede rests that would have interrupted the sound flow in any case. This shows that what Bach requests is not so much an interruption but an energetic attack. This articulation of CS2 should also be regarded as an integral characteristic and transferred to all further statements. By contrast, it is the interpreters' discretion whether the wedged approach should be transferred to the occasional parallel in equal rhythm (see A: m. 19, B: m. 44, and T: m. 60) and be retained in the CS2-derived episode motif. (The latter is less likely since there are several examples in other fugues where Bach repeats an indication if he desires it in episode material.) Non legato articulation is appropriate for consecutive leaps (as in S+T mm. 25-26, B: mm. 39-41 and 62-67) and for unexpected extensions of the subject (see S: mm. 9, 56, and 84; B: m. 15) and their sequences or imitations, as well as for all long notes in cadential-bass patterns, whether occurring in an episode or a subject entry.

The score features only one ornament symbol, the cadential mordent in m. 100. Approached stepwise, it begins on the main note, may comprise five notes owing to the reduced tempo in the closing ritardando, and ends on an eighth-note $A\sharp$ preceding the eighth-note $B\flat$.

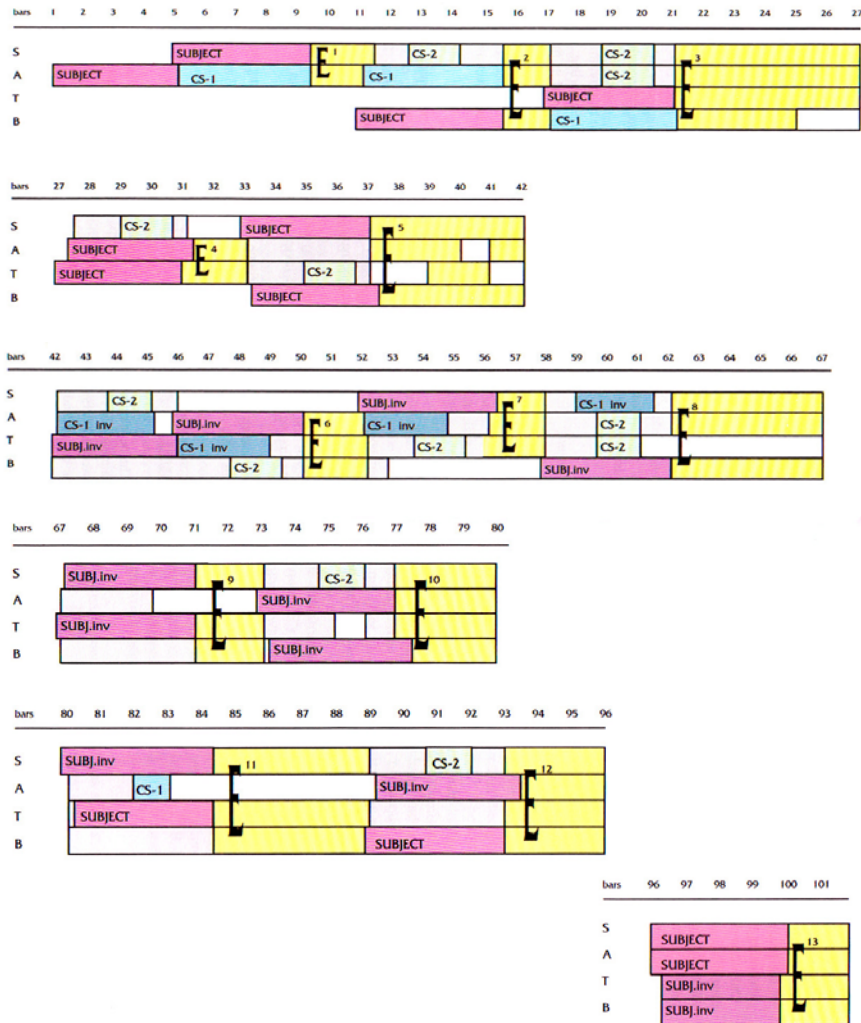
The design of this fugue is so transparently laid out that it requires no sophisticated analysis. There are five sections, each encompassing four subject statements (one in each voice), one or more intermittent episodes, and a closing episode. The composition ends with a coda comprising another set of four subject statements as well as the final episode.

- Section I contains four single entries in original shape (A S B T). The two episodes linking the subsequent entries are both short and entirely based on sequential prolongations. The closing episode E3, by contrast, presents in its first four measures material that is more developed before ending with two non-motivic measures. Harmonically the four entries are all in the home key (alternating tonic and dominant), and even the final episode does not leave $B\flat$ minor.
- Section II begins in three-part texture and only regains the full ensemble after the intermittent episode. It contains two strettos. These combine first the inner voices (T+A), then the outer ones (S+B). Corresponding with the design of section I, the linking

episode (E4) is short and made up of sequencing material while the closing passage is five measures long and presents more complex motifs. This section begins in B \flat minor, but the second stretto and most of the closing episode (until m. 41₁) are in the relative major key (D \flat major). The final measure returns to the home key.

- Section III introduces the subject inversion with four single statements. As in section I, the first two entries follow one another, while the other two are each preceded by two-measure episodes (E6, E7). With regard to material, however, these bridging episodes appear much more independent than their earlier counterparts. The closing episode (E8) is again five measures long. Harmonically, these four statements modulate from the tonic to the subdominant (E \flat minor). Due to the inversion of the subject and its main counterpart, entries do not necessarily close in the key in which they set off (compare m. 52 with m. 56 and m. 58 with m. 62). Yet, as in the preceding section, the closing episode returns again to B \flat minor.
- Section IV corresponds with section II insofar as it consists of two strettos, a short bridge in the center and a closing episode. It is linked to section III in that it uses exclusively the subject inversion. The two strettos refer to the tonic and dominant key respectively.
- Section V combines in each of its two strettos one straight and one inverted subject statement. Despite the unexpected length, the inner episode develops as a sequential prolongation from the preceding entry, while the closing episode (this time considerably shorter) displays more independent material. Harmonically, the second of the two strettos marks the final return to the tonic. The closing episode with its descending soprano line, its repeatedly sustained dominant note F in the lower voice, and its final dominant-seventh chord prepares a confirming cadence in the home key. The expected resolution at m. 96₁, however, turns this close into a deceptive cadence. This provides a truly convincing transition to the fugue's short but extremely powerful coda.
- The coda surpasses everything that has been heard so far by combining the mixed strettos of section V into a single four-part block of two parallel original entries and two parallel inverted statements. The latter are slightly shortened, giving way to a final cadential formula that closes this extraordinary fugue.

There is a stunning analogy between the layout of this fugue and that of the D \sharp -minor fugue from the first volume of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (compare the respective chapter on pp. 139-146 in this book).



The development of tension in this fugue presents itself as a mighty increase in consecutive sweeps. After two overall crescendos, I < II, III < IV, section V begins in greater intensity than any of the preceding sections and gains even more dynamic momentum in its episode's rising sequences. Only then does the tension abate somewhat toward the second mixed stretto. The deceptive cadence should surprise listeners, and the coda may outshine everything.