

WTC II/23 in B major – Prelude

This prelude consists almost exclusively of virtuoso patterns. Scale passages, interplay of hands in toccata style and superimposed peak-note lines determine the composition, while motivic material remains negligible. The first relevant cadential close occurs in mm. 11-12 where it confirms the modulation from the tonic B major to the dominant F# major. Only five and a half measures later, the prelude modulates to G# minor, the relative minor key of B major. As this harmonic close coincides with a change of texture and pattern, it must be regarded as the second structural caesura.

There are altogether six sections. One of them (see the asterisk) ends in an imperfect cadence. Given the return to the tonic in the center, the prelude falls into two equal halves.

I	mm. 1-12 ₁	I—V	B major to F# major
II	mm. 12-17 ₃	V—vi	F# major to G# minor
III	mm. 17 ₃ -23 ₃	vi—I	G# minor back to B major
IV	mm. 23 ₃ -28 ₃	I—iii*	B major to D# minor
V	mm. 28 ₃ -33 ₁	iii—V	D# minor to F# major
VI	mm. 33-46	V—I	F# major back to B major

With twelve and fourteen measures respectively, the two outer sections are much longer than all others. They also complement each other in their harmonic development (I: tonic to dominant, VI: dominant to tonic). The two innermost sections, too, are analogous regarding their harmonic progression: the modulation from G# minor to B major corresponds to that from D# minor to F# major. As will be shown, all these harmonic relationships are matched by correlations in material and texture.

The basic character of this piece is rather lively. The constant, never interrupted 16th-note motion underscores this impression, as do the scales and ornamented broken chords. With the exception of mm. 12-14 and 23-27, even the eighth-notes are confined to broken-chord figures. The tempo that best expresses these characteristics is swift; the upper limit is determined only by the ornaments, which should still sound clear and crisp and not risk losing their metric precision. The appropriate articulation is a light touch. An elastically rebounding non legato for the accompanying eighth-notes and a sparkling, light quasi legato for the 16th-notes are the predominant features. Broader non legato is used only for the few cases of melodic eighth-notes, and legato is confined to the ornaments.

In the lively tempo one is likely to choose for this piece, the number of ornaments required may pose a problem. It helps considerably to imagine all trills, slides, and appoggiaturas as fully-written note values. Not only does that take away some of the fear, it also clarifies their metric position. This is important since trills in the left hand should have the same speed as those in the right and slides like the one in m. 23, which is part of a melodic figure, should be transferred to all recurrences of the same figure, in this case to the two sequences. (A similar slide in m. 26₃ is spelled out, probably because of the required accidental.)

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piece in G major, 3/4 time. The first system, labeled 'mm. 1-2', shows a right hand with a melodic line of eighth notes and a left hand with a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The second system, labeled 'mm. 23-28', features a right hand with a melodic line of eighth notes and a left hand with a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The third system, which is unlabeled, continues the melodic and harmonic patterns. The notation includes various ornaments such as trills, slides, and appoggiaturas, which are indicated by specific symbols and accidentals.

The main features providing melodic orientation in this prelude are to be found in peak-note lines. This is particularly true in sections I, II, and VI. Section I consists of two distinctive patterns that build different kinds of curves. The one in mm. 1-2 can be read as two large “hooks”: in the right hand, there is an ascent over 1½ octaves followed by a descent of only half the scope. The left hand, beginning like an inverted imitation, counters with a one-octave descent followed by a half-octave ascent. This design, obviously geared toward an effect of brilliance, creates corresponding dynamic curves with climaxes in m. 2 on the downbeat (left

hand) and the middle beat (right hand) respectively. The following longer development is strung together by a peak-note curve in the right hand (see the ascent/descent in mm. 3-6/7-12₁: C#-D#-E-F# / A-G#-F#-E-D#-C#-B-A#). The left hand sets off with a hint of independence but then resigns itself to mere accompaniment. In this homophonic pattern, the climax thus falls on m. 7₁. In section VI Bach uses the same components for a somewhat different pattern, as seen in the right hand's descending line in mm. 38-45₁. The best dynamic rendering—anything but easy given the “long breath” needed—would be a continuous diminuendo from m. 38 to the end.

Section II begins with four measures in which the two uppermost voices of a texture that is momentarily enriched to three parts play melodic eighth-note groups forming a superimposed line. Section IV, the shortest of the prelude with only five measures, is the melodically most intense. It stands out even more than it would elsewhere because the sections surrounding it, III and IV, are composed in toccata style and thus form no melodic lines, neither directly nor indirectly. By contrast, section IV is conceived in consistent three-part texture and even presents a small motif. In its upper voice (mm. 24-25), a richly embellished falling triad leads into an octave leap before being complemented by relaxing eighth-notes in the middle voice. The combination is sequenced, at first exactly, then with an extension. After more “sigh” motifs and a quasi-cadential trill, an imperfect cadence concludes this section.

The following music example shows the lines in the sections discussed above—the prelude's “skeleton.”

I

mm. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

II

mm. 12 13 14 15 16 17

III
mm. 17 18 19 20 21 22 23

IV
mm. 23 24 25 26 27 28

V
mm. 28 29 30 31 32 33

VI
mm. 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46

WTC II/23 in B major – Fugue

The subject of this fugue is designed with two endings: an accented (or “male”) one up to m. 4₁ and an unaccented (or “female”) one concluding at m. 5₁. The “male” ending is determined by the point where the dominant resolves into the tonic and thus concludes the perfect cadence in B major. The notes filling the space to the downbeat of m. 5 serve as an extension that can be interpreted as a metric complement, i.e., as extending the subject so that it reaches a desired four-measure structure. Harmonically, however, these notes (A#-G#-F#-E-D#) serve no independent function but only prolong the tonic. It will therefore not come as a surprise that in the course of the fugue, Bach modifies this “female” ending liberally, up to a point where it assimilates the shape of episode material, and that he eventually drops it altogether.

In its main body, the subject consists exclusively of half-notes that describe a single, indivisible gesture. Except for the final semitone, which features the resolution of the leading-note into the octave, the pitch pattern displays only intervals of a third or larger. The harmonic backbone is a simple cadential progression, with one harmonic step per measure:



Two different dynamic representations of this subject are conceivable. How the development of tension is felt depends on the performer’s susceptibility to harmonic over melodic processes. If the melodic ascent is regarded as prevalent, then the subject should be taken as a single crescendo, complemented by a short diminuendo wherever the “female” ending retains its original falling line. Conversely, no relaxation occurs in cases where the “male” ending is followed directly by episode material. (Care must be taken not to break the line momentarily in the descent G#-E-C#; such rendering would cut the subject in two.) If, however, the harmonic design is perceived as essential, then the increase of tension should lead to the subdominant function, the G# at m. 2₁. This climax would then be followed by a diminuendo through two or three measures. (In this case, it is vital not to play the C# in m. 3₁ more softly than the ensuing A# so as not to risk fracturing the subject.) As can be imagined, these two contrasting interpretations of the dynamic gesture have a far-reaching impact on the entire composition.

The fugue features altogether fourteen subject statements. The table below indicates the “male” ending of each statement and shows an asterisk where a “female” ending similar to that in the initial measures follows.

1.	mm. 1-4 ₁	B*	8.	mm. 42-45 ₁	S
2.	mm. 5- 8 ₁	T*	9.	mm. 48-51 ₁	B
3.	mm. 10-13 ₁	A*	10.	mm. 53-56 ₁	T
4.	mm. 14-17 ₁	S*	11.	mm. 60-63 ₁	T
5.	mm. 19-22 ₁	B(*)	12.	mm. 75-78 ₁	B
6.	mm. 27-30 ₁	T	13.	mm. 85-88 ₁	T
7.	mm. 35-38 ₁	A	14.	mm. 93-96 ₁	S



The subject’s trunk as listed above remains completely unchanged throughout the fugue. Neither inversions nor stretto and parallel statements are employed.

The lack of modification in the subject itself leaves ample room for regular contrapuntal work. Bach has invented three counter-subjects for this fugue. Two of them appear exclusively in the first round of entries, while the third accompanies the subject for the remainder of the fugue and also pervades some of the episodes. CS1 is introduced in B: mm. 5-8₁ with a female ending extending until m. 9₁. Its trunk consists of three measures with similar patterns, laid out in sequences. The first subphrase (mm. 5-6₁) begins with an upbeat to a syncopated half-note and concludes with three eighth-notes in stepwise descent, thus describing a perfect curve. The following two subphrases represent ascending sequences, each of them a fourth higher than the previous one. The entire group should therefore be rendered as an increase in intensity. Phrasing between the subphrases may or may not be enhanced by actual cuts in the sound flow. Its expression by dynamic means (relaxation followed by a new active rise) is, however, crucial. The tripartite body is finally complemented by a female ending that prolongs both the final harmony and the melodic descent at the end of the third subphrase. CS1 recurs three times, once in each of the four voices in ascending order following the textural rise of the subject's statements (T: from m. 10, A: from m. 14, S: from m. 19). CS2 is first heard in B: mm. 10-14₁. It also begins with an upbeat to a syncopation. But both this note and its resolution are much more extended than in CS1, so that the first subphrase spans two measures. A second subphrase follows with an increase to m. 13₁ and a decrease to the final note.

These two early counter-subjects are designed to draw the listener's attention to the subject's female ending. This is particularly obvious in the case of CS2, which modifies the harmonic resolution on the final note of the subject's trunk in favor of an interrupted cadence: see, e.g., m. 13₁ where the expected conclusion in B major is thwarted by the G# in the bass, which converts the chord into a G#-minor triad (vi of B major) and postpones the resolution to the final note of the female ending in m. 14₁.

An identical process occurs in mm. 17-18. Interpreters who have opted for shaping the subject along harmonic lines, i.e., with the climax on the subdominant and the final tonic as a dynamic resolution, will find Bach's diversion to the deceptive chord particularly rewarding to play.

CS3 is introduced in S: mm. 28-30₁ and accompanies almost all of the subject's further entries. It consists exclusively of eighth-notes winding downward in a pattern that can be read as an ornamented imitation of the subject's central segment. This imitative relationship determines the dynamic design in this counter-subject, allowing for the same two solutions that are possible in the subject:

The B-major fugue encompasses twelve subject-free passages. Owing to the design of the subject with two endings, it must be determined where exactly one should assume the beginning of secondary material. In entries accompanied by CS2, the answer is obvious since the diversion to the interrupted cadence and subsequent resolution do not allow ending with the subject's trunk. In m. 22, however, CS2 is absent, the female ending of CS1 is transformed to a tie prolongation, and the ending of the subject is transposed, thus changing the harmony after the return to the tonic has already taken place. In such a case, it must be assumed that m. 22 does not belong to the subject-dominated field. In many cases later in the fugue, however, no full return to the tonic occurs at all since the final tied note of CS3 often remains unresolved. Thus mm. 30-35 do not contain a single downbeat without a suspension in one of the voices.

In all those entries where the subject's original female ending cannot be ascertained, episodes are therefore regarded as beginning after the subject's trunk.

E1	mm. 9-10 ₁	E7	mm. 51-53 ₁
E2	mm. 18-19 ₁	E8	mm. 56-60 ₁
E3	mm. 22-27 ₁	E9	mm. 63-75 ₁
E4	mm. 30-35 ₁	E10	mm. 78-85 ₁
E5	mm. 38-42 ₁	E11	mm. 88-93 ₁
E6	mm. 45-48 ₁	E12	mm. 96-104

The episodes display a variety of material. There are fragments of the counter-subjects (particularly from CS1 and CS3), small independent figures, and sequence models involving several voices. E1 and E2 are short and serve to link subsequent subject statements. Their characteristic features include a varied imitation of the subject's female ending (B: mm. 9-10, A: mm. 18-19) and an anticipation of the first subphrase of CS1 (T: mm. 9-10 and S: mm. 18-19). In E3, the severed female ending and its sequence (S+A+B: mm. 22-23₁, 24-25₁) are linked by a measure of neutral material before this episode combines two quotations of the CS1-subphrase with a do-si-do formula in the alto and a cadential-bass pattern. (The bracketed tie in S: m. 25 is best ignored to ease recognition of the CS1 subphrase.) E4 presents M1, an ascending tetrachord (S: mm. 30 and 31) in conjunction with two complete quotations of CS3 and neutral passages. The motif is ubiquitous in E5 and E6, and it even invades the first two measures of the intermittent subject entry (mm. 42-43). Its complement is a short version of CS3 (A: mm. 39-40), a do-si-do formula (in E5), or a measure of neutral material (in E6). E7 presents the first sequence model: mm. 51-52₁ recur descending in mm. 52-53₁. E8 combines CS3-derived material in the bass with free contrapuntal material in the other voices before it ends—the first episode to do so after E3—in a perfect cadence. E9 is the longest and most independent episode in the fugue. It consists of three sequence models: descending in mm. 63-65₁ ≈ 65-67₁ and (shorter) 67-68₁; ascending in mm. 68₃-69₃ ≈ 69₃-70₃ and 70₃-71₃, descending in mm. 71₃-73₁ ≈ 73-75₁. E10 begins with several mostly inverted quotations of M1 (mm. 78-80₁). These are followed by increasing ascents (S: mm. 80-81, B: mm. 81-82) and rounded off by an embellished three-part closing formula that will recur later in the fugue. E11 features another sequence model (A+T: mm. 89-91₁ ≈ 91-93₁; B: mm. 88₃-90₃ ≈ 90₃-92₃). E12 begins with several four-note groups that are remotely related to M1. An incomplete quotation of CS3 (S: mm. 100-101) leads to a transposition of the embellished three-part closing formula that concludes E10. To sum up: three episodes end in a perfect cadence with complete resolution of all voices (E3, E8, and E12). A fourth (E10) must be regarded as structurally corresponding owing to the relationship of its close with that of the final episode.

Apart from the correspondence between the two embellished closes, there is another structural analogy. The first two episodes linking subject entries accompanied by CS1 employ material from CS1 combined with a line derived from the subject's female ending. Similarly, the first two episodes connecting subject entries accompanied by CS3 quote CS3, again combined with a frequently recurring short line in eighth-notes (M1).

In view of the rhythmic complexity (the half-notes in the subject are complemented in other components by quarter-notes, eighth-notes, and all kinds of syncopated and tied notes; even 16th-notes appear in one of the sequence models within E9), the basic character of this fugue is rather calm. The tempo is determined by this character, but also has to take into account the *alla breve* time signature. Generously swinging half-note beats may convey the idea. The relative tempo of the prelude to the fugue is best chosen in a proportion of 3:2, i.e., three quarter-note beats in the prelude correspond to two half-note beats in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: prelude beats = 96, fugue beats = 63.)

The articulation requires legato in all components that are essentially melodic: counter-subjects, episode material, and the subject's female ending. Cadential-bass patterns (as in B: mm. 25-27, 34-35, 59-60, 84-85, and 103-104) are, as always, excluded from this rule. So are consecutive leaps. The latter require special attention in this fugue. As the subject's trunk consists exclusively of leaps, it should be taken in a slightly detached style. To obtain the right duration of the articulated notes, together with a good expressive tone quality (a detail often badly neglected in non-legato playing), it may help to imagine the first, unaccompanied subject entry played by a cellist who uses very broad bow strokes. Phrasing, too, is an extremely important issue. This applies to the sequences in CS1, the partitioning in the middle of CS2, and the episode segments deriving from primary material, but is equally crucial in the episodes' sequence models. Ornaments do not occur in this fugue.

The structural layout of this composition is clearly determined not only by the cadential closes observed in four of the episodes, but also by symmetries in the entering order of the voices and the consecutive build-up of the ensemble. There are four sections with significant analogies.

- Sections I and II, closing on the downbeats of mm. 27 and 60 respectively, contain five subject statements each: I: B T A S B and II: T A S B T. Both sections encompass a full round of statements complemented by a redundant entry. In both sections, the voices enter in ascending order, with a return to the bass after the soprano, and the redundant entry occurs in the voice that opens the section. In both sections, the first three episodes are united by the use of similar material (see E1, E2, and E3, which all use fragments of the subject and CS1; and E4, E5 and E6, all featuring M1). In section I, the fourth subject statement does not sound, as could have been expected, in full four-part texture, since the bass rests from m. 14 onward. The full ensemble is thus postponed for the redundant

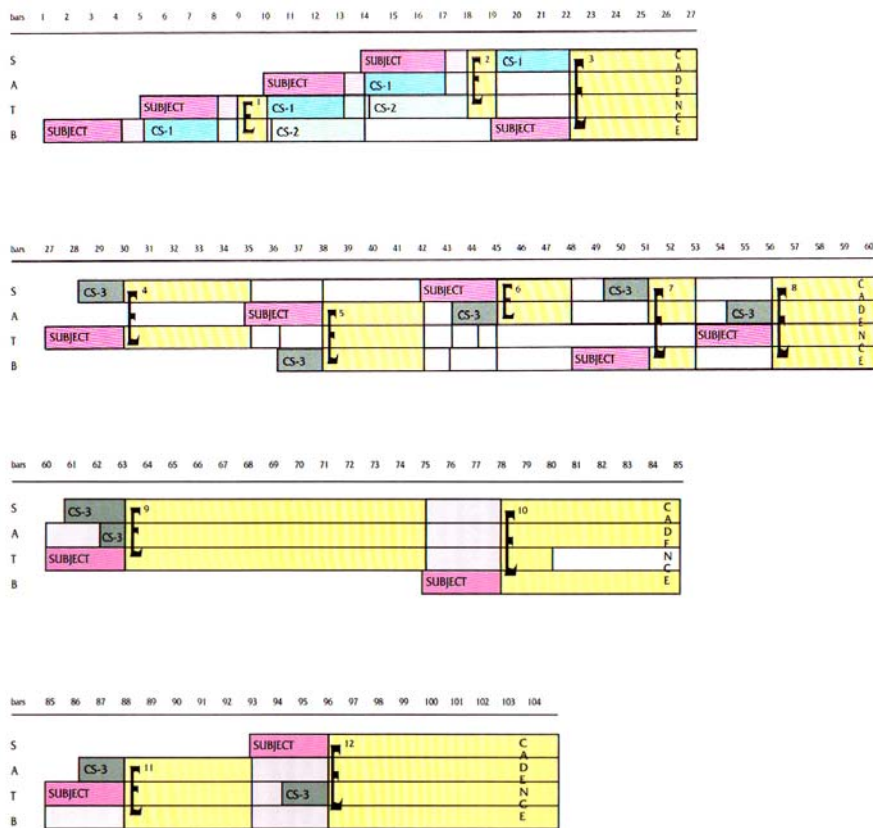
entry. Similarly in section II, the completion of the ensemble is delayed twice (from m. 42 onward, the alto and then the tenor rest) and also materializes only with the redundant entry.

- Sections III and IV feature two subject statements each: III: T B and IV: T S. Despite this comparatively limited presence of the principal thematic component, these two sections span 25 and 20 measures respectively. The analogies are: In both sections a tenor entry in three-part texture (see mm. 60-64 and 85-88) is followed by a subject statement in a (more exposed) outer voice and in full four-part ensemble. In both sections, the linking episodes (E9 and E11 respectively) consist exclusively of sequence models. In both cases, the latter statement is preceded by a four-measure variation of CS3 in the lowest voice (mm. 71-74 \approx 88₃-92₃). And in both sections, the concluding episode ends with the same embellished closing formula.

Moreover, the fugue as a whole displays a superimposed symmetry created by harmonic progresses: within the second half of the fugue, the progression in the harmonic development is exactly reversed:

- Section I remains in B major. Not until the concluding cadence does Bach establish the secondary key of F# major.
- In section II, F# major is redefined as the dominant of B major. The first three entries sound once again in the home key.
- The last two entries of section II turn toward other tonal anchors, sounding in G# minor (the tonic relative) and E major (the subdominant) respectively, and conclude the first half of this fugue in E major.
- Like the entries of section I, those of section IV are in the home key, on the tonic and dominant respectively.
- Just as the beginning of section II returns to B major, so the end of section III returns to B major.
- Just like the conclusion of section II (and of the fugue's first half), the outset of section III (and of the fugue's second half) sounds in the subdominant-key of E major.

One can thus state that, while structural processes as created by the use of material and texture establish very conspicuous correspondences between each of the two section pairs, I + II and II + IV, thus seeming to divide the fugue into two halves of very different content and density, harmonic processes create an almost perfect axis symmetry, thus knitting the two halves inextricably together.



As shown in the detailed observations discussed above, each of the four sections is conceived as an increase of tension. Within the first two sections, this increase is very gradual as the full sound of the four-part ensemble is delayed until the very end. The third and fourth sections, by contrast, contain a fairly steep build-up of tension between their respective entry pairs.

Within the first half of the fugue, there is almost no interruption in the two processes of gradual increase since all intermittent episodes have bridging function. The second half of the fugue, by contrast, features episodes dominated by independent material as well as by structural processes of their own. These subject-free passages, which are also much longer than those bridging consecutive entries in the earlier sections, thus create a definite color contrast to the surrounding subject statements.

When comparing the level of intensity in the first half of the fugue, the second section appears somewhat lessened in comparison to the first. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that the entering order B T A S B creates a stronger impact than that of its structural sequence T A S B T. On the other hand and perhaps more importantly, section I features its five subject statements surrounded by two independent counter-subjects, while section II only contains a single regular accompaniment of the subject. What is more, CS3 is entirely dependent on the subject in terms of both pitch pattern and dynamic design. Last but perhaps not least, the change of mode toward the end of section II also softens the increase in this section.

Within the second half of the fugue, the converse process can be observed: section III contains longer episodes in contrasting color than section IV, thus suspending the rise of tension between consecutive entries more. Furthermore, the bass entry in section III is not accompanied by any counter-subject, thus forfeiting some of its climaxing power. By contrast, the corresponding soprano statement in section IV comes supported by CS3 in the tenor and a varied version of CS3 in the alto.

The dynamic rendering of the B-major fugue should thus aim at depicting the two-fold symmetry as eloquently as possible: the large-scale structural analogies between sections I/II and III/IV and the harmonic axis symmetry of the fugue with the correspondences of sections I/IV and II/III.