WTC I/17 in A♭ major – Prelude

The A♭-major prelude is dominated by a single motif. It appears so frequently that its absence is ultimately more striking than its presence. Of a total of 44 measures there are only eight (mm. 16, 17, 33, 34, 39, 40, 43, and 44) that do not feature the motif. The immediate sequence in m. 2 and the imitation of model and sequence at the octave in mm. 3-4 give hints that this prelude may be conceived as an invention.

The first harmonic progression closes at m. 9_1. The change of accompanying material indicates that this cadence is structurally relevant. As the repeated appearance of D♮ in subsequent measures signifies, the next harmonic progression modulates. The target key, E♭ major, is reached after a cadential formula at m. 18_1. This cadence again marks the end of a structural section.

There are altogether four sections in this prelude:

I	mm. 1- 9_1	tonic confirmed
II	mm. 9-18_1	modulation to the dominant
III	mm. 18-35_1	modulation back to the tonic
IV	mm. 35-44	renewed confirmation of the tonic

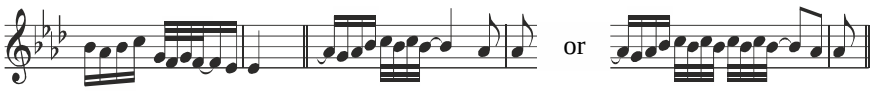
Several portions in this invention-style prelude recur very faithfully, in only slight transformation:

mm. 3-5_1 ≈ 18-20_1 transposed
mm. 9-18_1 ≈ 26-35_1 transposed, voices inverted
(the analogy is slightly blurred in the closing formula)
mm. 20-22_1 ≈ 41-43_1 transposed

The rhythmic pattern is simple, based primarily on eighth-notes and 16th-notes. With regard to the pitch pattern, the principal motif consists of a broken chord preceded by a written-out inverted mordent. Similar combinations of leaps with ornamental 16th-notes can also be found in other components of the motivic material. The basic character is thus rather lively. The tempo should be fast enough to bring out the ornamental quality of the 16th-notes, but not so fast as to deprive the eighth-notes of their spirited character. The corresponding articulation is an effortless non legato for the eighth-notes and quarter-notes, and a quasi-legato touch for the 16th-notes. The only exception from this pattern of articulation occurs in the longer notes in U: mm. 43-44 where A♭-G-A♭, as one of the typical

closing formulas, must be legato. Within the quasi legato, various shades of touch are required in order to bring out the different textures. Passages in hidden two-part structure with a melodic line moving before a backdrop of a repeated pedal (as in U: mm. 15-16, L: m. 32, and U + L: mm. 39-40 where weightier and lighter notes alternate regularly) should be distinguished from those with an ornamented pedal (mm. 13-14 and 30-31 where the structural notes are interspersed with feathery inverted mordents) and from the remainder of the 16th-note passages in which all notes take part equally in the melodic line.

The prelude contains two kinds of ornaments, indicated by the same mordent symbol. The two closing formulas in mm. 17-18 and 34-35 each feature the typical interrupted (point d'arrêt) trill with anticipation of the resolution note. Both begin on the upper neighbor note and shake in 32nd-notes. The other four mordent signs, appearing on the quarter-notes in mm. 36 and 38 and on the 16th-notes in mm. 41 and 42 respectively, can be played as just that: three-note mordents that begin on the main note either because they are approached stepwise, as in mm. 36 and 38, or because they embellish the initial note of a phrase, as in mm. 41 and 42.



mm. 17-18 mm. 34-36

The principal motif dominating this invention-type prelude, M1, spans one measure. The downbeat rest on which it ends is later often replaced by a note. Within this metrical structure, the two 16th-notes serve as an upbeat to the four eighth-notes. The dynamic presentation should outline this with a little crescendo to the climax on beat 2 and a successive diminuendo to the end, regardless of whether the downbeat appears as a rest (as in mm. 2, 4, 5 etc.) or as a final note (as in m. 3 and mm. 6-16).

In the course of the composition, M1 appears twice with strictly polyphonic counterparts and twice with accompaniment patterns. Initially it is counteracted by full chords, double notes, or octave leaps. As representatives of homophony in an essentially polyphonic composition, all these components should be kept in the background: played in neutral tone color, considerably softer than the motif and, wherever they appear extended (as e.g. in U: mm. 3-4), with beat 2 particularly light. The same applies in the chordal companion's variation in mm. 36 and 38. Another homophonic accompaniment figure is heard in mm. 13-14 and 30-31. It, too, should be kept in low profile, while the scalar descent in the hidden two-part structure

in mm. 15 and 32 creates a diminuendo that contrasts with the dynamic curve in M1. The other two settings show the principal motif accompanied by "counter-motifs," i.e., polyphonically independent figures. CM1 appears in mm. 9-12 and 26-29. Its model features a 7/16th-note upbeat followed by a long downbeat; in the sequences, the downbeat note is replaced by an ornamental figure. In all cases, the upbeat leads in crescendo to the downbeat and is then followed by a decrease through to the fifth 16th-note. CM2 also begins with an upbeat in 16th-notes (L: mm. 20-22 and 41-43). The climax on the downbeat is followed by a descending octave leap providing the relaxation. Yet another companion appears only transitorily. In L: mm. 22-24$_1$ and U: mm. 24-26$_1$, M1 + sequence are contrasted with descending zigzag figures in continuous diminuendo.

The prelude's design comprises two basically analogous sections, a short middle section and a coda that recalls material from the middle section. The analogous sections appear in the harmonic progressions typical for baroque pieces featuring a recapitulation: the modulation from the tonic to the dominant is answered by one from the subdominant back to the tonic.

I	A	mm. 1-9 (I)	III	A'	mm. 18-20 (V)
	B	mm. 9-18 (I – V)		B'	mm. 26-35 (IV – I)
		M1 against CM 1, then M1 with accompaniment figure, concluded with a cadential formula			
II	C	mm. 18-26 material from A, followed by M / CM 2 and M / transitory figure	coda		mm. 35-44 material from A (varied), followed by an accomp. figure in parallels, M / CM 2, and a final cadence.

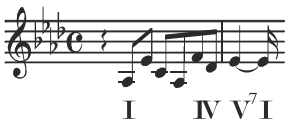
The tension in each section is determined by the extent of polyphonic contrast, the direction of the sequences, and the harmony.

WTC I/17 in A♭ major – Fugue

Beginning on the second beat of the first measure, the subject of the A♭-major fugue conveys the impression of starting with an up-beat. The conclusion after only a single measure therefore comes as a surprise, as one is still expecting the main content and is now challenged to believe that this was already it. The principal idea of this fugue comprises seven regular eighth-notes in all. (In the course of the fugue, the final note alone comes in a great variety of values, from the 16th-note in m. 29 to the

dotted half-note in m. 6.) The sensation of incompleteness in this subject is enhanced by the pitch line, which features the rather unusual closure on the fifth scale degree, and by the abruptness of the harmonic progression.

This short subject is definitely conceived as an indivisible phrase. Its pitch pattern consists almost exclusively of leaps in broken-chord setting. The rhythmic structure is of utmost regularity in the subject itself. The same does not, however, hold true in the remainder of the fugue, where the eighth-notes appear mixed with 16th-notes, quarter-notes and several syncopated values.



The harmonic background to this subject is somewhat peculiar. The subdominant is reached in metrically weak position on m. 1_4, followed in m. 2_1 by the dominant-seventh chord that resolves—melodically inert—on the tied 16th-note of beat 2 (see e.g. the harmonization of the statement in mm. 5-6). This implies that whenever the final note of a statement is shortened, the resolution may be cut off from the subject's main body. This is already the case in the answer, where the bass is way into the partial sequences following this entry when the E♭-major resolution of the $B♭^7$ chord appears.

The dynamic outline poses a problem, despite—or perhaps because of—the subject's short range and straightforward character. On the one hand, the significant features, which are (harmonically) the subdominant and (melodically) the highest pitch F, coincide; but they fall on a weak beat. On the other hand, the final note, which in the original version holds rhythmic importance through its sudden length, appears so frequently shortened that it may not be entirely convincing as a climax either.

The fugue contains fifteen subject statements.

1.	mm. 1-2	T	9.	mm. 23-24	A
2.	mm. 2-3	B	10.	mm. 24-25	S
3.	mm. 5-6	S	11.	mm. 27-28	B
4.	mm. 6-7	A	12.	mm. 28-29	T
5.	mm. 10-11	T	13.	mm. 29-30	A
6.	mm. 13-14	A	14.	mm. 30-31	S
7.	mm. 17-18	T	15.	mm. 33-34	S
8.	mm. 18-19	A			

The subject never appears in inversion, stretto, or parallel.[1] Leaving aside the rhythmic variations in the final note and the adjustment in the answer (the lowering of the second subject note in mm. 2 and 6), two interval modifications repeatedly, both with considerable harmonic impact. In mm. 18, 28, 29, and 30, an initial fourth interval is followed by the broken triad of m. 1, thus mixing features from *dux* and *comes* and resulting in harmonic ambiguity. More strikingly, the first three of these entries, all of them composed in the minor mode, borrow several notes from their major-mode relatives (see m. 18: C + A for C♭ + A♭; m. 28: D + B for D♭ + B♭; m. 29: G for G♭). Two statements feature a seventh leap instead of the original sixth between the fourth and fifth eighth-notes. The result is a seventh chord that re-casts the subject as modulating (see mm. 23_2-24_1: from E♭^{7} to A♭, and mm. 24_2-25_1: from A♭^{7} to D♭).

This fugue does not comprise a single consistent counter-subject. The 16th-note figure accompanying the subject in mm. 2-3 recurs frequently and in much variation throughout the fugue but is not linked as a companion to the subject. Instead, it provides motivic material that, much as happens in the E-major fugue from the WTC I, pervades the entire fugue.

The composition encompasses eight subject-free passages.

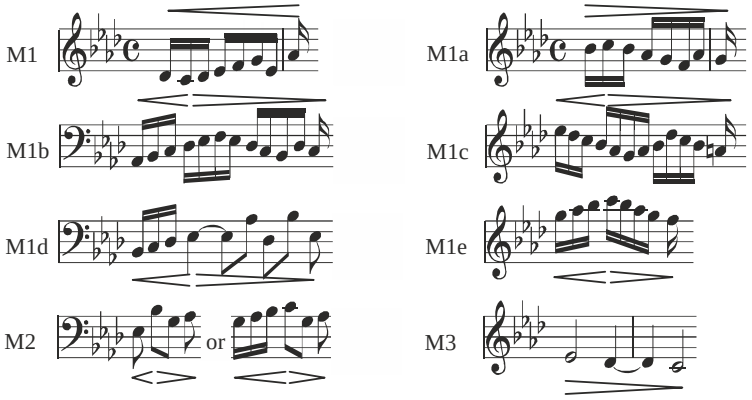
E1	mm. 3-5	E5	mm. 19-23
E2	mm. 7-10	E6	mm. 25-27
E3	mm. 11-13	E7	mm. 31-33
E4	mm. 14-16	E8	mm. 34-35

The material that characterizes these episodes also occurs outside of them, overlapping considerably with the subject but never serving as its dedicated companion. All of it seems, in one way or another, derived from mm. 2-3, i.e., from the figure sounding against the subject's answer and from the first episode. Three figures serve as sources for the secondary material: the eight 16th-notes following the original subject statement,[2] the

[1]Only once, in an episode where the combination of interval and rhythm pattern suggests false entries, does a brief parallel occur; see mm. 21_4-22_1 alto/soprano.

[2]Introduced in m. $2_{2\text{-}4}$ (T), M1 recurs, with the opening note displaced to form an ascending scale, in m. 4 (B). In rhythmic variation with intersected syncopation it is also found in m. 27 (A, imitated in S). The inversion, M1a, appears in mm. 2_4-3_2 (T), 4_4-5_2 (B), 15_3-16_1 (A), 22_3-23_1 (A), and $25_{1\text{-}3}$ (T, with two sequences). M1b, an extended version combining the ascending scale with the M1 inversion, is found in mm. 5_3-6_2 (B), 7_2-8_1 (A), 8_2-9_1 (B), 9_2-10_1 (B), 23_2-24_1 (T), and 24_2-25_1 (T). An even more extended version materializes in mm. 29_1-30_2 (T). – M1c, the (free) inversion of the previous motif, occurs twice, in mm. 16-17 (S) and 18 (B). As a further development from the same root, the scalar ascent is complemented, after a syncopation, by a new tail in eighth-notes: for M1d see mm. 7-8 (B), 8-9 (S), 9-10 (A; here it gives way to a melodic closing formula), and in mm. 16-17 (B).

four eighth-notes extending the answer in the pattern of a partial sequence,[3] and the syncopated half-notes that, with an ornamental variation, sound against this partial sequence.[4] The episodes that are most closely related to the subject are those containing M2, i.e., E1, E3, E4, and E5. More remote variants of the motif in E6 and E7 also convey an impression of relatedness.



The only subject-free passage that serves as a cadential close is E8. In addition there is one instance within another episode where the motivic display is suspended and gives way to an extended cadential formula (see mm. 20-22, at the end of E5). Two further cadential closes appear integrated into the motivic material; both feature the typical do-si-do figure (see mm. 9-10 at the end of E2 and mm. 15-16 at the end of E4).

The relationship between the episodes is already evident from the exposure of their motivic content. The first half of E4 and the entire E5 are both direct variations of E3; similarly, E7 is a (more distant) variant of E6.

Only two episodes maintain the tension, thus serving as bridges between statements: in E1, a short descent is followed by rising motions, and in E7, the ascending motion in all voices of mm. 31-32 is complemented by a relaxation of roughly equal length. All other subject-free passages display a pattern of gradually decreasing tension, either because of apparent

[3]Introduced as a two-fold partial sequence of the subject, this motif is first heard in B: mm. 3-4 above an E♭ pedal (see E♭-B♭-G-A♭, E♭-A♭-F-G). It recurs as a separate motif, with occasional ornamental variation, in mm. 11-13 (B), mm. 14-15 (A) and mm. 19-21 (S). Remote relatives can be heard in mm. 25-26 and 31-32. A final "remote relative" combines the scalar ascent with a subsequent descent. This figure appears several times, with a varying number of free sequences; see mm. 11-13 (S), 14-15 (B), 19-20 (A) and 31-32 (B).

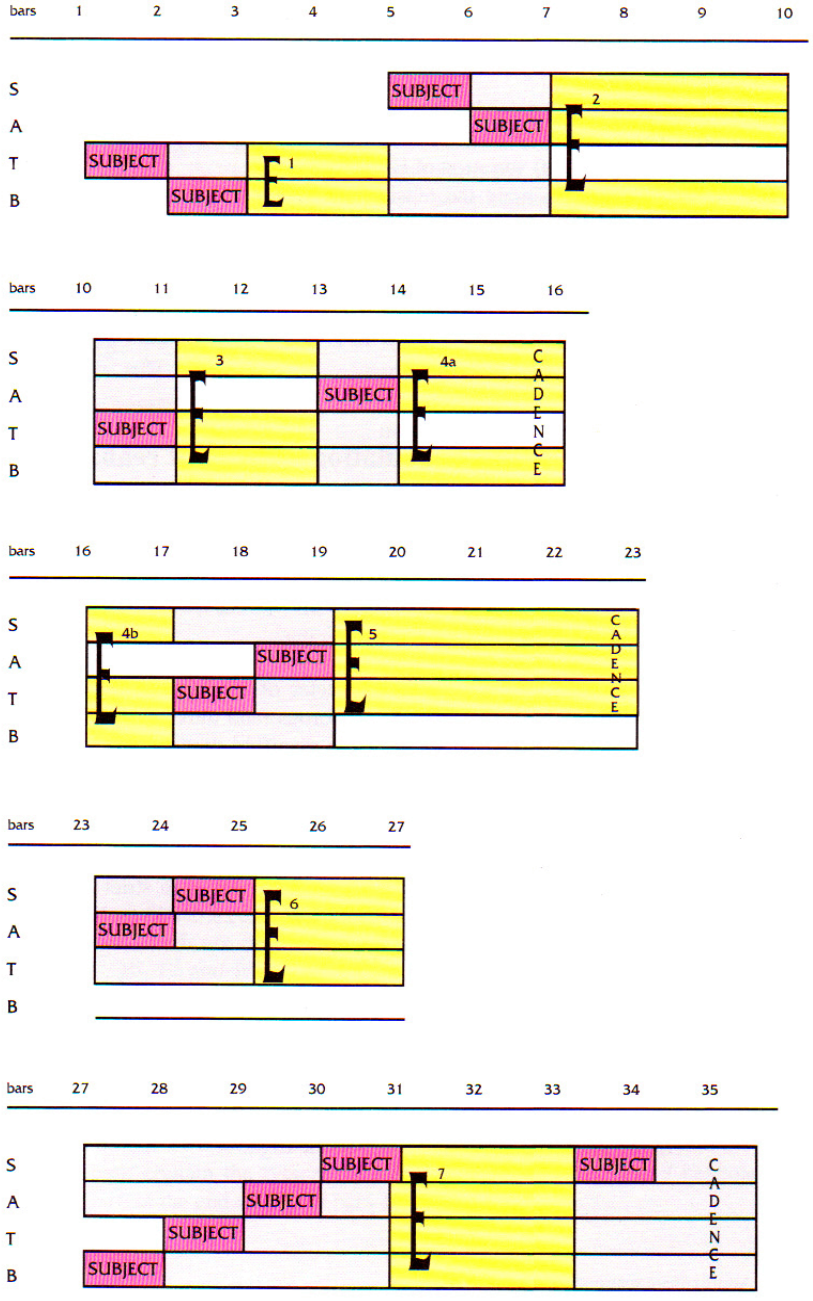
[4]First presented in the context of M2, this motif could, in fact, be read as a parallel to the M2 peak notes. The consecutive syncopations recur in mm. 11-13 (T), 14-16 (S) and 19-21 (T).

descending sequences (as in E3, E4, E5, and E6), or in hidden descents (as in E2 where the soprano features the falling A♭-major scale).

With the exception of the syncopated half-notes in M3, the rhythmic pattern in this fugue is simple. Moreover, the pitch pattern is made up of broken chords alternating with ornamental figures. It is thus easy to determine the basic character of this fugue as rather lively (or even very lively). The tempo is confined by the character of its primary material: the broken-chord leaps in the subject should sound vigorous and thus not too slow, while the various 16th-notes figures should by no means appear as mere virtuoso patterns, particularly in view of the manifold motifs Bach invented and developed, and thus not too fast. The corresponding articulation consists of bouncing non legato in the subject and M2, a fairly intense quasi legato in all motifs deriving from M1, and a melodious non legato in M3. The only longer note values that must be played in strict legato are the cadential formulas in S: mm. 15-16, 22-23, and 34-35, and in A: mm. 9-10. The fugue does not feature any ornaments.

The relative tempo of the swifter and lighter prelude in triple time to the more vigorous fugue in quadruple time is best established by equaling metric, and not rhythmic, values: an ideal proportion is one in which one measure in the prelude equals half a measure in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: prelude beats = 120, fugue beats = 80.)

The most obvious indicators that help determine the design of this fugue are the cadential formulas in mm. 9-10, 15-16, and 22-23. As the subject entries preceding the first of these closures constitute a perfect round of all four parts (T B S A), the first section seems thus ascertained. Between the cadential closes in mm. 9-10 and 22-23, the correspondence of E3 with the first segment of E4 and E5 creates a larger unit from m. 11 to m. 23. The reduction of the ensemble from four to merely two voices in mm. 23-24 further enhances the structural importance of this harmonic closure. Inside this superimposed frame of twelve measures, the closing formula in the middle of E4 generates a smaller caesura, confirmed in its structural value by the fact that the ensuing subject statement sounds in reduced ensemble. As no explicit cadential close occurs between m. 23 and the end of the fugue, one has to look for other indicators of structural layout. One hint can be found in the entering order of the voices. The five final statements (B T A S S) seem to form a group: they follow one another not only very closely and in a logical arrangement of gradual ascent, but also lead, after the tension-increasing E7, to the conclusion of the fugue in a redundant soprano statement. The return to the home key with the bass entry in mm. 27-28 further ascertains the confines of the final section.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The harmonic outline as established in the subject statements and cadential closes confirms the structural layout deduced above. The entire first section remains in the tonic key of A♭ major, which is substantiated by the cadence in mm. 9-10. The second section features entries in the tonic and its relative minor, and concludes correspondingly with a cadential close in F minor (mm. 15-16). The third section sets out in B♭ minor and, after the harmonically ambiguous second statement (B♭ minor/E♭ minor) reaches the dominant key (E♭-major cadence, mm. 22-23). The fourth section is characterized by the two modulating subject entries. Progressing from E♭ via A♭ to D♭, this section approaches the home key from the subdominant region. The beginning of the fifth section, as has already been mentioned, marks the return to A♭ major which, though weakened in the harmonically hybrid tenor and alto statements, is not abandoned again.

The five sections of this fugue present very individual faces.

- The first section comprises the usual build-up of tension created by the gradual increase of the ensemble. While the bridging episode E1 describes a concave curve, with a slight relaxation followed by a new rise preparing the second pair of statements, the section-closing episode E2 with its descending lines brings gradual relaxation.
- The second section begins in the tonic key and in four-part texture, but its second entry turns to the minor mode. Thus there is a decrease in tension between the two statements of this section. The two episodes enclosed in this section enhance this tendency of relaxation. After the cadential close in the middle of E4 the two remaining voices trail along somewhat indecisively.
- The two subject statements of the third section with their harmonic ambiguity are not made to bring forth powerful impulses either. The episode E5, which one more time recalls the descending sequences already heard in E3 and E4, blends well into this picture of "no news, no emotional features." The explicit cadential formula thus appears as the closure of a protracted decline, summing up sections I, II, and III as one large portion.
- The fourth section begins with the lowest number of voices found in a statement outside the initial one and is launched at a correspondingly reduced level of intensity. However, the harmonic design of the two modulating subject statements, together with the fact that they bring forth the return to the home key of the piece, endows this section with considerable urge.

- Although mollified transitorily during the episode, this urge continues even more powerfully in the four consecutive statements that mark the beginning of the fifth section. The ensuing episode E7, interestingly enough, is the only tension-sustaining one apart from the very first episode. After its deceptive cadence (m. $33_{2\text{-}3}$), the final statement sounds in an almost homophonic setting, crowning the fugue with a triumphant closure.