WTC II/21 in B♭ major – Prelude

This prelude is composed in polyphonic style. Passages in three-part texture alternate with phrases in two-part texture where the middle voice keeps extended silences. Within each section, however, part-writing is kept consistent. Most of the techniques characteristic of Baroque polyphonic style are used: strict or free imitation, full and partial sequences of motifs and models, inversion of shape, and inversion of voices.

The design shows two repeated halves, the second considerably longer than the first. The compound time signature 12/16 is reminiscent of a gigue. The uninterrupted flow of 16th-notes and the frequent patterns in gigue rhythm (pairs of eighth-note + 16th-note, as in the first halves of mm. 2-4 etc.) corroborate the impression that this prelude is composed along the lines of the Baroque dance genre that traditionally wrapped up a suite.[1]

The first harmonic progression concludes at m. 3_1 where the tonic is confirmed in a perfect cadence. This cadence should not be considered as structurally relevant, both because it marks the end of the first three-part combination of the main motif, and because the tied notes in the upper and lower parts essentially weaken the conclusion on the downbeat. Harmonic closes indicating structural caesuras occur at m. 17_1, where the subdominant key of E♭ major is established, and in m. 32 at the repeat sign, which confirms the dominant key of F major. These two perfect cadences thus divide the prelude's first half into two segments of almost identical length.

An analysis of the material presented in this prelude reveals several smaller sections that are essential for the work's layout without being harmonically conclusive. It is therefore advisable to describe the design on the basis of combined observations of harmonic processes and material presentation.

There are twelve (four + eight) sections in this prelude:

I	mm. 1- 8_{12}	B♭ major to F major (imperfect cadence)
II	mm. 9-17_1	F major to E♭ major (perfect cadence, subdom.)
III	mm. 17-28_1	E♭ major to F major (imperfect cadence)
IV	mm. 28-32_{12}	F major (perfect cadence, dominant)

[1] In Book II of the WTC, Bach thus includes a whole suite among his preludes: an allemande in D♯ minor, a courante in E major, a sarabande in F♯ major, and a gigue in B♭ major.

V	mm. 33-41$_{1}$	F major to F minor (perfect cadence)
VI	mm. 41-48$_{12}$	to G minor (perfect cadence, tonic relative)
VII	mm. 49-52$_{12}$	B♭ major (imperfect cadence)
VIII	mm. 53-56$_{12}$	to C minor (perfect cadence, subdom. relative)
IX	mm. 57-64$_{12}$	C minor to B♭ major (imperfect cadence)
X	mm. 65-76$_{1}$	modulation to F-major[7]
XI	mm. 76-83$_{1}$	continuation of F-major[7]
XII	mm. 83-87$_{12}$	return to B♭ major (tonic)

These sections encompass three analogous passages:

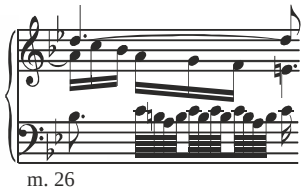
mm. 8$_{12}$-12	≈	mm. 52$_{12}$-56	transposed
mm. 13-17$_{1}$	≈	mm. 37-41$_{1}$	transposed and varied
mm. 28-32	≈	mm. 83-87	transposed

Another feature that is vital for a first overview is the sequence. Three categories can be distinguished: sequencing in all three voices, sequencing in the leading voice with free contrapuntal work in the other voice(s), and sequencing involving the inversion of voices.

model	*sequence*	*model*	*sequence*
mm. 9-10	mm. 11-12	mm. 33-34	mm. 35-36
mm. 13-14	mm. 15-16	mm. 37-38	mm. 39-40
mm. 19	mm. 20	mm. 41	mm. 42
mm. 22$_{1}$-22$_{7}$	mm. 22$_{7}$-23$_{1}$, 23$_{1}$-23$_{7}$	mm. 45$_{7}$-46$_{7}$	mm. 46$_{7}$-47$_{7}$
mm. 23$_{7}$-24$_{1}$	mm. 24$_{1}$-24$_{7}$, 24$_{7}$-25$_{1}$	mm. 57	mm. 58, 59, 60
mm. 25	mm. 26	mm. 62	mm. 63
mm. 65-66	mm. 67-68	mm. 70	mm. 71
mm. 72	mm. 73	mm. 76$_{7}$-78$_{7}$	mm. 78$_{7}$-80$_{7}$

The basic character of this prelude is rather lively. This is revealed above all in the simple rhythm and in the allusion to the gigue. The tempo should be fast enough to render the exuberance of the gregarious dance, but not so rushed as to reduce the intricate imitative patterns to a mere technical show. The score shows several ornaments. As the two compound symbols in mm. 7 and 26 indicate, Bach expects four trill notes against each of the 16th-note—a good measure for the limit of maximum speed.


m. 7


m. 26

In addition to these trills, there are three more ornaments. The mordent in m. 2 begins on the upper auxiliary and contains four notes, while the one in m. 8 is approached stepwise, begins on the main note, and needs only a single three-note shake. The inverted mordent in the principal motif appears in brackets, which points to its origin not from Bach's manuscript but from a copy. While the choice whether to include or disregard it is thus left to each performer, adopting it is, in fact, a good idea as it can be of great help to listeners in the manifold versions of the main motif. If the inverted mordent is incorporated in m. 1, it should be transferred to all measures featuring the version of the motif in which the 16th-note scale segment is complemented by three dotted eighth-notes in reverse motion, i.e., to mm. 3 (L), 5 (U), 8 (L), 49 (U), 65 (U), and 67 (U). What remains to be decided is whether an inverted mordent is preferable in all cases or whether the inverted motif (e.g., L: mm. 3-4) might not benefit from an inversion of the ornament (i.e., a simple mordent).

The thematic material of this prelude is determined by four motifs. M1 comes in numerous guises, which all share the beginning after a strong beat and the scale section in 16th-note leading to the next strong beat. With five regularly appearing variants, this motif dominates a large portion of the prelude (M1a = U: mm. 1-2_1, M1b = M: mm. 1_8-2_7, M1c = L: mm. 2-3_1, M1d = U: mm. $22_{2\text{-}8}$, M1e = L: mm. 31-32_1). M2, first heard in mm. 9-10, consists of two contrapuntally dependent parts. It can be heard as a pedal note with above it an embellished descent in the alternating strong beats of the two voices (see the octave parallel B♭-A-G-F, the first three notes with written-out inverted mordents, interspersed with broken chords). In pitch pattern, length, and texture M2 is thus distinctly different from M1. The dynamic shape follows the line formed by the peak notes and thus describes a two-measure diminuendo. M3 consists of a one-measure model in m. 13 that is sequenced three times in mm. 14-16. The texture is reminiscent of toccata-style. The right-hand pattern can be described as hidden two-part structure (see, e.g., m. 13: A-G-G before the harmonic "background" of a G-minor broken chord). The left-hand part accompanies with another two-part pattern consisting of cadential notes in the bass interspersed with upwards leaping fourths in the high register. M4, a two-measure unit restricted to the upper voice (mm. 28-29), is similarly designed in hidden two-part structure: as an ascent above a pedal C ornamented with inverted mordents. M5 (mm. 58-63, with imitation and inversion) is purely local.

The following table shows these motifs, albeit without specifying inversions. Cases of voice swapping are marked with *, developments or extensions with +, modifications with '.

mm.	*motifs*		*mm.*	*motifs*
1-3_1	M1a, M1b, M1c	—	49-52_1	M1a, M1b, M1b, M1b
3-5_1	M1a, M1b, M1c	—	52-53_1	M1a, M1c
5-7_7	M1a, M1b, M1b			
7_7-8	M1a, M1b var			
9-10	M2	—	53-54	M2
11-12	M2*	—	55-56	M2*
13-16	M3			
17-18	M1b, M1b, M1b, M1b			
19-20	M1d, M1c, M1d, M1c	—	57-58_1	M1d, M1c
21-22_7	M1b, M1b, M1b		58-64_7	M5, M1+
22-23_7	M1d, M1c, M1d, M1c			
23_7-28_1	M1+		64_7-67_1	M1a, M1a, M1b, M1b', M1b'
			67-70_1	M1a, M1b, M1b', M1b', M1b
			71-76_7	M1b'+
			76_7-83_1	M1+
28-30_1	M4, M1b	—	83-85_1	M4, M1b
30-32	M1e, M1e, cadence	—	85-87	M1e, M1e, cadence

mm. 33-34	M4 in indirect parallels
mm. 35-36	M4 in indirect parallels
mm. 37-40	M3
mm. 41-48	M1+

The design of this "prelude in the character of a gigue" thus reveals itself as a remote relative of sonata form. This becomes particularly obvious when one combines structural observations derived from the distribution of the motifs with those based on the main harmonic steps in the piece:

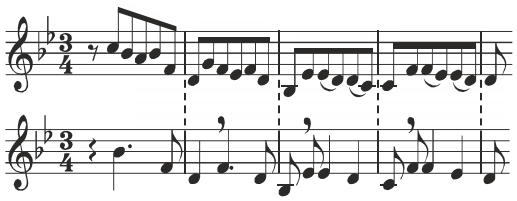
	mm.	*motifs*	*harmonic function*
exposition section I	1-16	M1, M2, M3	tonic – subdominant
exposition section II	17-32	M1+, M4	dominant
development section	33-48	M4+, M3, M1+	modulating
recapitulation section I	49-64	M1, M2, M5	tonic
recapitulation section II	65-74/\83-87	M1+, M4	tonic
insertion (in lieu of coda)	74-82		modulating

WTC II/21 in B♭ major – Fugue

Launched after an eighth-note rest and concluding at m. 5_1, the subject of this fugue spans exactly four measures. The beginning is particularly noteworthy as the first note does not form part of the tonic chord. Among the forty-eight fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, there are only two

that set off from a note outside the home-key chord: The fugue in F♯ major (WTC II/13) begins on the leading note, thus approaching the key note from below, while this fugue in B♭ major begins on the second scale step, preceding the tonic from above.

Phrasing within this subject is regular. Four segments, each of one-measure extension, are grouped in the pattern of figure/sequence, figure/sequence, with the effect that, despite a lack of outstanding rhythmic or melodic features, the subject is easy to remember even for listeners. The rhythmic pattern within the subject consists exclusively of eighth-notes. Throughout the fugue, these are joined by quarter-notes and occasional longer note values, but the overall effect remains one of simplicity. An analysis of the pitch pattern reveals that the first subphrase and its varied sequence are based on broken-chord patterns (see, e.g., B♭-F-D in mm. 1-2, with B♭ ornamented by a written-out turn). The third subphrase and its sequence, by contrast, are composed as three-note descents of iambic note repetitions. There is thus an underlying structural skeleton with a distinct rhythm behind the apparent uniformity of eighth-notes. Highlighting this may present a challenge for performers:



The harmonic design of the subject is also simple. Although slight differences occur in the course of the piece, the progression consists mainly of tonic (mm. 1-3_1), subdominant (mm. 3_2-4_1), dominant-six-four (m. 4_2), dominant-seven (m. 4_3), and tonic (m. 5_1). The dynamic outline follows the dance-like design: the first two subphrases increase slightly, while the next two provide the corresponding relaxation.

The B♭ major fugue encompasses ten subject entries.

1. mm. 1-5_1 M	4. mm. 21-25_1 L	7. mm. 47-51_1 L
2. mm. 5-9_1 U	5. mm. 32-36_1 M	8. mm. 54-58_1 M
3. mm. 13-17_1 L	6. mm. 40-44_1 U	9. mm. 63-67_1 U
		10. mm. 78-82_1 U

Apart from an interval adjustment in the answer at m. 5_3, the subject remains unchanged. Only the final statement features harmonic variation: it opens and closes in F major but diverts in between to the minor mode.

Bach gives the subject several companions. In the course of the second to fourth entry one recognizes two recurring patterns, replace by two others from the fifth subject statement onward. The first two do not meet the requirements of true counter-subjects, i.e., to be melodically characteristic and independent from the subject. Their recurrence, however, requires them to be mentioned. They will be referred to in lower-case letters, as a reminder of the above reservations: In its most basic form, cs1 consists of nothing but a protracted do–si–do formula. As such it appears in M: mm. 14-17_1 and, with a diverted resolution, in U: mm. 22-25, while mm. 6_2-9_1 function as a precursor. Introduced in U: mm. 14-17_1, cs2 doubles the subject's second to fourth subphrase in parallels of differing distance.

CS3, the first full-fledged counter-subject, is first heard in U: mm. 33-36. Consisting of three sequential ascents whose syncopations avoid the subject's phrase-cuts, its dynamic equivalent is a protracted increase of tension up to the final tie (see, e.g., m. 35_3), followed by a relaxation that is either explicit (as in m. 36: G-F) or implicit (as in m. 44). CS3 recurs faithfully in every further subject statement, although with several modifications including an abridgement at the beginning, a belated resolution, and a transposition a fifth down. CS4 is paired with CS3 in a manner similar to cs1/cs2. Introduced simultaneously in the lower voice, it moves in half-notes and dotted half-notes which sound like a widely spaced cadential-bass pattern. A dynamic rendering would have to consider the inherent tension between harmonic steps, with the result that the climax of CS4 coincides with that of the subject, once again restricting polyphonic independence. Occasionally shortened like CS3, CS4 also recurs in each of the remaining entries. Surprisingly given its similarity with a cadential pattern, it not only wanders through all three voices but also changes its pitch position with reference to the subject: while in mm. 33-36 it confirms the subject statement's F-major key with a pattern in F major, it ends rooted in D in entries of quite different harmonic definition, like those in mm. 40-44 (B♭ major) and 47-51 (G minor).

All entries except for the first are followed by a subject-free passage:

E1	mm. 9-13_1	E4	mm. 36-40_1	E7	mm. 58-63_1
E2	mm. 17-21_1	E5	mm. 44-47_1	E8	mm. 67-78_1
E3	mm. 25-32_1	E6	mm. 51-54_1	E9	mm. 82-93

With regard to their material and harmonic formulas we can ascertain the following subdivisions:

E2a/E2b	= mm. 17-19_1-21_1	E7a/E7b	= mm. 58-60_1-63_1
E3a/E3b	= mm. 26-29_1-32_1	E9a/E9b/E9c	= mm. 82-86_1-90_1-93

This fugue challenges interpreters more than many others with the task of distinguishing episodes from thematic phrases since the secondary passages contain so many fragments of the subject and its counter-subjects. Thus E2 begins like an extension of the preceding entry, and E5 takes up the subject's first three measures including the early quasi-contrapuntal companions. E8, quoting the two distinct subject segments immediately after the return modulation to the home key, gives the impression of a false entry. Other episodes establish analogies among themselves. Thus E6 and E7 are remotely related to E2a (mm. 17-19$_1$), E9b (mm. 86-90$_1$) is reminiscent of E3a (mm. 26-29$_1$), and E9c (mm. 90-93) is an exact transposition of E3b (mm. 29-32$_1$). The role each episode plays in the dynamic design of the fugue is determined by the rising or falling direction of the sequences and secondary lines.

The simple rhythmic pattern, the ornamental concept of the subject, and the comparatively low degree of contrapuntal activity all indicate a playful fugue of rather lively character. The tempo may be fairly swift. Feeling a whole-measure pace brings a good result, but care should be taken that the slurred pairs retain their traditional "active-passive" or "heavy-light" patterns and do not sound hammering. The relative tempo of the prelude to the fugue may establish a proportion between the larger beats: half a measure in the prelude corresponds with one measure in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: dotted quarter-notes in the prelude = 84, quarter-notes in the fugue = 126.)

The articulation includes non legato for the quarter-notes and other longer note values, a crisp quasi legato for the eighth-notes outside the slurred patterns, and true legato for the slurred note-pairs in the second half of the subject. Note, however, that Bach indicates these slurs only once. According to the conventions of Baroque performance practice, it was the interpreter's responsibility to act accordingly in all corresponding cases. In the case of this fugue this entails that analogous note pairs must be articulated analogously. This regards the second half of all subject entries, their recurrences in episodes, and the parallel segments from cs1.[2]

[2]It pays to be precise. Only seconds that in a slow tempo would be identifiable as appoggiatura-resolution are slurred. The subject's third segment comprises what in another mood would be regarded as "extended sigh motifs": an iambic note repetition with resolution, which turns into a new note repetition followed by its resolution, and an eventual concluding tone. Where the whole "extended sigh motif" is sequenced (as happens here), the concluding tone and the new upbeat are *not* slurred. As a result, the lower voice inserts cuts at B♭-E♭ and C-F in mm. 15$_1$ and 16$_1$ while the upper voice slurs all note pairs.

Outside the confines of thematic quotations, slurring is based on the harmonic relationship between two notes, and phrasing is dependent on the component's origin.[3]

The score contains only one ornament, a mordent in the lower voice of m. 26 which is notated in brackets to indicate its origin from a copy. If played, it begins on the main note and contains a single three-note shake. As it bears no melodic or structural relevance and is not even imitated, it can be omitted without any loss for the composition.

The entering order of the subject statements, the cadential closes within the episodes, and the introduction of two new contrapuntal companions from m. 32 onward underline the design of this fugue. There are three sections. Section I encompasses the two initial statements, a bridging episode (E1) and the third entry followed by a cadential close in the home key (E2a). The second half of the same episode then represents a "change of mind" in that it undertakes a new start with a modulation and thus prepares for a redundant statement. Thereafter, a slightly longer episode with two dynamically decreasing segments (E3) completes this section with a strong cadential close in the dominant key F major. With regard to material, this section is unified by the exclusive appearance of cs1 and cs2 as companions to the subject.

The beginning of section II is marked by the simultaneous introduction of the two "true" counter-subjects CS3 and CS4, which stay with the subject thereafter. The section contains three subject statements. They are linked by short episodes and completed by a passage that takes up the first, aborted cadential close of the fugue (compare E6 with E2a), concluding here in E♭ major, the subdominant of the fugue's B♭ major. The fact that this cadence remains unresolved in the middle voice ties the second and third sections together. This impression is reinforced by the use of the same contrapuntal material for both sections, in contrast to the first section.

The third section consists of three statements separated by long episodes. The observation that the third statement is redundant (it repeats an upper-voice entry), together with the recognition of a "false" lower-voice entry in the preceding episode (E8), leads to the assumption that section III is built along the same lines as section I, thus presenting a disguised recapitulation.

[3]Phrasing is easily overlooked between the first two eighth-notes in L: m. 17, M: m. 18, L: m. 36, L: m. 39, M: m. 52, U: m. 58, L: m. 61, L: mm. 70, 72, 74, 75, and M: mm. 83-84. Conversely, the first two eighth-notes must be slurred owing to their harmonic relation in U: m. 19, L: m. 20, M: m. 37, M: m. 39, M: m. 51, and L: m. 59.

Section I

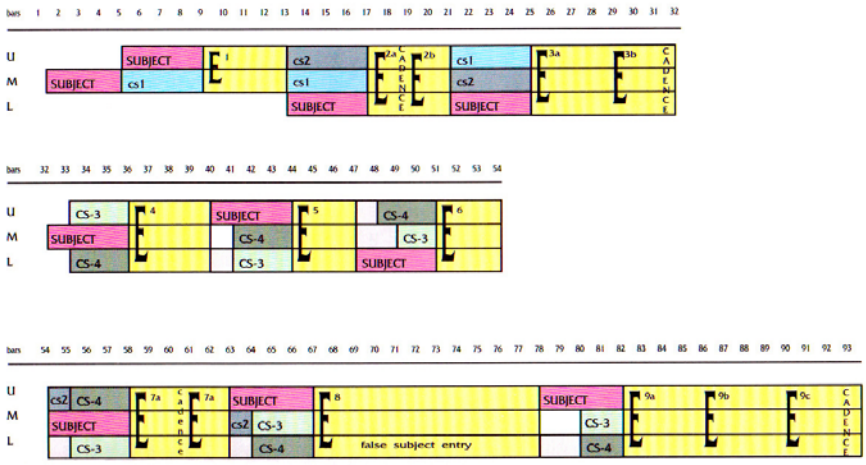
M	B♭ major	tonic	}	main round of entries
U	F major	dominant		
L	B♭ major	tonic		
L	F major	dominant		redundant entry

Section II

M	F major	dominant	}	main round of entries
U	B♭ major	tonic		
L	g minor	tonic parallel		

Section III

M	E♭ major	subdominant	}	main round of entries
U	c minor	subd. parallel		
(L	false entry in episode			
U	F major	dominant		redundant entry



This is a playful fugue in which powerful build-ups of tension are not the issue. The alternation of subject statements and slightly lighter episodes determines most dynamic processes. Additional developments are created by the dynamic gesture conveyed in each episode and by the change of mode in the subject statements.

Within the first section, the tension rises from a graceful but not too subdued beginning through three subject statements and a bridging episode. It subsides during the cadential close of E2a, only to be picked up

immediately afterward and brought to a first climax in the redundant lower-voice entry. Owing to its pitch position a fourth below the previous one, this statement gives the (deceptive) impression of a fourth-voice entry. The seven-measure E3 provides a gradual relaxation.

Section II begins, despite its one-measure long rests in the upper and lower voices, in a more assertive color as the subject is now enhanced by new and independent counter-subjects. Despite a dynamically diminishing episode, the second entry maintains the elevated tension, mainly because of its exposed pitch position in the highest register of the Baroque keyboard. The next episode with its increase then provides a powerful preparation toward the first minor-mode statement in this fugue which, due to the particular character of the subject, is for once much heavier and more powerful than the original in the major mode. The tension subsides only in the final episode of this section.

The first entry of section III combines the parallel motion of cs2 (extended here to two measures and even briefly joined in m. 55 by a third parallel in the lower voice) with the two self-assured counter-subjects. This statement can thus be interpreted as representing the climax of the fugue. The inverted curve of E7 leads to another minor-mode statement which, also reinforced by a cs2-parallel in its first measure, picks up the high tension of the previous statement with slightly different means. The long episode E8 with its false subject entry then provides a gradual relaxation. The redundant statement enters into this considerably lowered tension. It sounds much softer than its predecessors, not least because its first two measures are conceived in reduced ensemble. The first segment of E9 thwarts an immediate decline of the tension, but the final eight measures of the fugue lead to a completely relaxed ending.