

WTC II/24 in B minor – Prelude

The final prelude in the *Well-Tempered Clavier* is the only one with a tempo indication. Together with the *alla breve* meter, the word *Allegro* hints at Bach's idea of swift half-measure beats. The mood is supported by the strikingly regular phrase structure: all patterns take up four measures. They are either neatly filled by thematic material or feature a 3½-measure motif complemented by a half-measure link. The only interruption of the dance-like regularity occurs in mm. 57-58. These two measures are not only "extra" (see the four-measure phrases in mm. 49-52, 52-56, and 59-62) but additionally halted by a fermata.

The consistent two-part texture features voice-splitting only in the final measures. The degree to which the two voices are independent of one another varies: there are phrases with obvious accompaniment patterns (e.g., mm. 49-52) and genuine contrapuntal settings (e.g., mm. 33-36). The principal motif, the only one to recur in immediate imitation, is evenly distributed between both voices. Other motifs display a strong preference for the upper voice and do not make use of imitation, thus creating a more homophonic style. The accompanying figure of each motif can take various forms but contrapuntal interplay among the motifs themselves does not occur. The prelude can thus be described as determined by motifs in two-part setting.

Small-scale harmonic closures occur at the end of most four-measure phrases, sometimes even within them, and therefore cannot be regarded as relevant in the overall structural layout. The tonic is thus regained in V-i cadences on the downbeats of mm. 3, 5, 7, and 9. Only thereafter is the first modulation launched. In the absence of strongly determining harmonic processes, structural analogies help to present an overview of the layout. There are several corresponding phrases:

- mm. 1-4 ≈ 17-20 (transposed)
 ≈ 41-44 (transposed and varied,
 with two measures in inverted voices)
- mm. 5-8 ≈ 29-32 (transposed, voices inverted)
- mm. 9-13₁ ≈ 45-49₁ (transposed)
- mm. 13-17₁ ≈ 49-53₁ (transposed, lower part varied)
- mm. 21-24 ≈ 59-62 (transposed, ending varied)

On the basis of these analogies, the prelude can be described as comprising four sections:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------|---|
| I | mm. 1-16 | M1 + imitation on the tonic (B minor) |
| II | mm. 17-40 | M1 + imitation on the tonic relative (D major)
and M1 + imitation on the subdominant (E minor) |
| III | mm. 41-58 | M1 on the dominant (F# minor) |
| IV | mm. 59-66 | M1 on the tonic (B minor) |

Given that the composer has prescribed the character he desired for this piece, the first questions performers usually face when dealing with Bach's music are already answered: the character is lively. Almost all 16th-notes are written-out ornamental figures. There are turns in different metric positions (U: mm. 2 and 21-23, L: mm. 1-3, U: mm. 10 and 12), inverted turns (mm. 9 and 11), and off-beat trills with diverting suffixes (mm. 7 and 13-16). Regarding the articulation of the three note values determining this piece—quarter-notes, eighth-notes, and 16th-notes—the distinction characteristic for compositions in lively character between the faster and slower note values thus concerns the eighth-notes and quarter-notes. The eighth-notes should be played in a light, transparent legato touch, while the quarter-notes are mostly non legato. There are, however, a number of exceptions: the light legato of the eighth-notes should be interrupted where escape notes separate slurred note-pairs (thus in U: m. 26, the F# does not form part of the main melodic line). And quasi legato must give way to dense legato where this is explicitly indicated, as in U: m. 58. Particularly easy to overlook are interruptions of the eighth-note flow owing to phrasing. This is particularly crucial in U: mm. 13-16 after the downbeats and in mm. 23 and 61 before the final eighth-note where the last of three almost identical sub-phrases must be separated from the typical upbeat + appoggiatura-resolution group. In the quarter-notes, the usual non legato touch must be suspended for all note-pairs constituting appoggiatura-resolution.¹ Other quarter-notes to be played legato are those in the traditional do-si-do formula (U: mm. 65-66). The quarter-notes that are marked with wedges (U: mm. 21-22 and 59-60) are not necessarily shorter than those without but heavier, pointing toward an overall climax that, after having been twice avoided (in the downbeats after the wedged notes), is finally reached in the appoggiatura-resolution group after the third sub-phrase.

¹These may or may not be indicated as slurred: compare U: m. 8 and L: m. 32 with U: m. 24. See also the syncopations in U: m. 37 with sequences and imitations in mm. 38-39 as well as similar figures in mm. 53-54, and at m. 64₁ the three-voiced E#-F#, D-C#, B-A#.

In addition to the ornamental figures written out in 16th-note values, the score features a number of embellishments. The mordents on the weak part of the appoggiatura-resolution pairs in mm. 8, 24, and 32, printed in brackets and thus obviously deriving not from the manuscript but from an early copy, should only be played by performers who can trill very softly without disturbing the relaxation. The same holds true for the mordents that, in U: mm. 34 and 36, grace notes in the middle of a gradual decrease. If executed, all these mordents begin on the main note since they are approached stepwise, and comprise three notes. The inverted mordent in m. 31 might be interpreted as a means of emphasis; one can easily imagine the composer-teacher adding it in the score of a student who failed to properly accent the syncopation in the lower part. The turn in U: m. 32, if played—it is also given in brackets—begins on the main note and thus encompasses five notes: four 32nd-notes and a final 16th-note. The grace-note in m. 57 designates an appoggiatura of eighth-note duration, possibly with a minimal slow-down for this note. Its resolution, reduced to eighth-note value, is definitely lengthened by the fermata.

The thematic material consists of three motifs. They represent lessening degrees of importance, diminishing polyphonic independence, and gradually reduced complexity. M1, the principal thematic component, marks the beginning of all four sections. It consists of two identical subphrase-heads (mm. 1-2₁ ≈ 3-4₁) that are linked in the latter part of m. 2 and complemented with a tail in form of a descending broken chord in m. 4. In both subphrases, the initial measure is composed as a circling motion around the note D, and the climax falls on the following downbeat C#. Among the two climaxes, the first is more important. The second, a mere repetition, is slightly weaker. Harmonically, M1 is interesting in its design as each subphrase ends on the dominant, while the tonic is only transitorily regained at the beginning of the second subphrase. At the end of the motif, a link is required to return to both the downbeat position and the tonic. M1 is accompanied by four different contrapuntal companions (“counter-motifs” or CM), two of which are remotely related. CM1a (L: mm. 1-4₂, 17-20₂, and shortened, 41-42) also comprises two subphrases of almost identical design, with the climax falling onto the syncopations. CM1b (U: mm. 5-8 and 29-32) is differently structured, consisting of three sequences (the last of them varied) that build a single overall arch and thus do not share the binary design of M1. CM1c (U: mm. 21-24 and 59-62) resembles CM1b with regard to the rests on its first three downbeats, its rising peak-note line, and its conclusion in an appoggiatura pair, which serves as a climax. A fourth companion is heard only once (U: mm. 25-28).

M2 follows the two initial statements of M1 after a link (mm. 8₂-9₁). It consists of a two-measure subphrase and its sequence, with the subphrase itself made up of a one-measure unit and its varied inversion. The accompaniment in mm. 9-13₁ and 45-49₁ moves in simple lines of even quarter-notes. In mm. 33-37₁, by contrast, the motif is countered with a contrapuntal voice. M3, introduced in mm. 13-16₁ and taken up in mm. 49-53₁, is conceived as a one-measure element launched from the syncopated second eighth-note of the measure, sequenced three times in rising direction, and accompanied by neutral quarter-notes. The prelude's structure can thus be presented as follows:

<i>Section I</i>	<i>Section II</i>	<i>Section III</i>	<i>Section IV</i>
M1 + CM1a	M1 + CM1a	M1 + CM1a var	M1 + CM1c
M1 + CM1b	M1 + CM1c	M2 + CM2a	+ 4 mm.
M2 + CM2a	M1 + CM1d	M3 + CM3a	
M3 + CM3	M1 + CM1b	+ 4 + 2 mm.	
	M2 + CM2b + 4 mm.		

Section I is devoted to the introduction of the three motifs. Polyphonic complexity decreases in the course of the sixteen measures, thus causing a gradual drop in intensity. Section II is set up as a development. M1 recurs four times, modulating and taking four kinds of companions. M2 is also modified as it substitutes its neutral companion with a polyphonically active one. The final four measures of the section develop the upbeat + appoggiatura-resolution figure in a syncopated version. Section III is conceived as a recapitulation. While the two M1 statements from the prelude's beginning are here contracted into one—see the inversion of voices half-way through the four-measure unit—M2 and M3 follow with their original accompaniments. Moreover, the harmonic development also corresponds to what was customary for the relationship between exposition and recapitulation in Bach's time: the tonic of the opening measures recurs as a subdominant at the outset of section III. Four measures with a falling bass line (see L: mm. 53-56 B-A-G-F#-E-D-C#-B-A#) and a free continuation of the upper voice lead into a dominant-seventh chord with fermata and general pause before the two last measures of this section carry out the return to the tonic. With regard to dynamics, the slight decrease in M1 and M2 is counteracted here by a stronger increase owed to the modification of M3, whose sequences no longer fall but rise in fourths. It is left to mm. 53-57 to complement this intensification with a relaxation. But even this decrease is not yet complete by the time it is interrupted. The resolution follows all the more stringently in the ensuing cadential close. Section IV

appears as a coda. It consists of a single statement of M1 followed by four cadential measures in hardly disguised homophonic texture. Interrupted by three further “general pauses” on the middle beats in mm. 62, 63, and 64, these measures pick up the appoggiatura-resolution prominently featured in the prelude’s middle section and lead to a final climax at m. 64₁.

This B-minor prelude, determined by thematic material made up of two-part motifs, is thus laid out as a Baroque sonata movement with exposition (mm. 1-16), development section (mm. 17-40), recapitulation (mm. 41-58), and coda (mm. 59-64).

WTC II/24 in B minor – Fugue

The subject of this fugue spans five and a half measures, from the upbeat to m. 1 to the downbeat of m. 6. The combination of simple upbeat, downbeat ending and 3/8 time evokes a lightly swinging character. There are two subphrases: the initial falling tonic chord complemented by the leading-note and a return to the keynote, and a four-measure embellishment of the descent G-F#-E-D. The rhythmic pattern in the subject itself as well as in the entire fugue is simple, consisting predominantly of eighth-

notes and 16th-notes. The pitch pattern contains not only broken chords but also many melodic octave leaps. The subject’s harmonic design is a simple cadential progression that Bach lavishly ornaments in later statements. The dynamic design traces these features. In the first subphrase, the upbeat energizes m. 1₁ while m. 2₁, representing the return to a note already heard, is completely relaxed.

In the second subphrase, the peak-note line coincides with the harmonic design: the climax falls on m. 3₁, the representative of the subdominant and the beginning of the descent. The second of these two climaxes is stronger than the first. In terms of phrase structure, the subject thus presents itself as consisting of a smaller “preliminary gesture” followed by a larger “principal gesture.”

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the subject of the fugue in B minor. The first system is a single melodic line in 3/8 time, starting with an upbeat. Below it are figured bass symbols: *i*, *iv*, *i*, *iv*, *V*, *i*. The second system is a two-staff arrangement (treble and bass clefs) for measures 81-87. Below it are figured bass symbols: *V*, *i*, *V*, *i*, *iv*⁷, *V*⁷, *III*, *V*⁷, *ii*⁷, *V*, *i*.

The fugue comprises ten subject statements, one of them incomplete:

1. mm. 0-6 ₁	M	6. mm. 44-50 ₁	L
2. mm. 6-12 ₁	U	7. mm. 54-60 ₁	M
3. mm. 15-21 ₁	L	8. mm. 70-76 ₁	L
4. mm. 26-32 ₁	M	9. mm. 81-87 ₁	U
5. mm. 35-41 ₁	U	10. mm. 96-98 ₁	M _{incomplete}

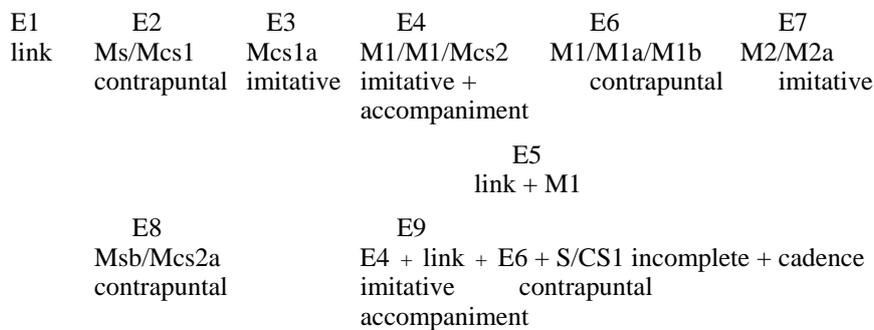
Apart from the usual adjustments of the first interval in the answer, the only modification the subject undergoes is the varied and extended upbeat in m. 70. Neither inversions nor grouping into strettos or parallels occur. Moreover, the polyphonic density never surpasses that of two thematically shaped voices. While there are two counter-subjects, they never coincide. CS1 only accompanies the subject in mm. 6-12, 15-21 and, partially, in mm. 26-32. As soon as CS2 emerges, CS1 breaks off and disappears. (This retreat of CS1 at the arrival of CS2 is repeated in m. 73). CS1 begins with a varied imitation of the subject's first subphrase, continues in a trill with anticipated main note and ascending resolution, and ends after a linking scalar descent with the sequence of the same trill. Dynamically, the imitating segment follows the design in the subject's first subphrase and the trill prolongs the relaxation. The descending scale then serves as a new upbeat, complemented by the second trill with a second decrease. CS2 is first presented in L: mm. 29-32₁. Its features are most unusual for a contrapuntal figure in Bach's polyphonic style. Moving in even 16th-notes that zigzag in large leaps, it resembles accompaniment patterns in homophonic textures. Its hidden two-part design shows a bass line B-A-G#-C#-F# below an ornamented descent A-G#-F#. The dynamic layout with a single decrease presents no polyphonic contrast whatsoever to the subject.

The image shows a musical score for the first system of the fugue. It consists of three staves. The top staff is the treble clef, the middle is the bass clef, and the bottom is the bass clef. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 3/4. The subject (S) is marked in the first measure of the top staff. Counter-subject 1 (CS1) is marked in the first measure of the top staff and continues through the first two measures of the middle staff. Counter-subject 2 (CS2) is marked in the first measure of the bottom staff and continues through the first two measures of the middle staff. The score includes various musical notations such as trills (tr), slurs, and dynamic markings.

The ten subject statements are interspersed with nine subject-free passages. Some of them are extremely short, others span up to fourteen measures. There are, however, good reasons to take even the very short links seriously—not only on paper but, more importantly, in performance. This is required both by the particular design of this fugue with its alternation of statements and episodes and by the beginning of CS1, which imitates the subject’s initial subphrase and thus enters “late.”

- | | |
|--|--|
| E1 mm. 6-7 (only M) | E6 mm. 50-55 ₁ (54-55 only L) |
| E2 mm. 12-16 (U + M) | E7 mm. 59-69 ₁ (59 only L) |
| E3 mm. 21-27 (U + L) | E8 mm. 76-82 ₁ (82 only L) |
| E4 mm. 32-36 ₁ (35-36 only L) | E9 mm. 87-100 |
| E5 mm. 41-44 ₁ | |

Material occurring in the episodes includes motifs derived from the counter-subjects (Mcs1 and Mcs2), as well as a number of independent motifs. In addition, there are false entries (subject: see M: mm. 96-98₁; CS1 see L: mm. 97₃-99₁). Interestingly, the motifs stemming from primary material occur almost exclusively in the initial third of the fugue, while those in the central third introduce more and more independent features as secondary material, and those in the final third review material introduced earlier. The following chart gives an overview of the material presented in the episodes of this fugue, and the relationship among the episodes:



In other words: E8 is related to E2 (both are extensions of preceding statements), and E9 reviews E4 and E6. The entries surrounding the two final episodes may thus be considered as a kind of structural recapitulation.

The basic simplicity of the rhythmic pattern together with the thematic broken chords and octave leaps indicate a rather lively character. The 3/8 time signature hints at fairly swift whole-measure beats. Probably the best tempo proportion between the prelude and the fugue is achieved by relating the larger beats of the two pieces: a half-note / half-measure in the

prelude corresponds with a dotted quarter-note / a measure in the fugue. (Approximate metronome settings: prelude beats = 54, fugue beats = 162.) The appropriate articulation comprises quasi legato for the 16th-notes and non legato for the eighth-notes. The most significant exception—and one that is bound to cause errors for all but the very careful performers—occurs in the pairs of longer note values that constitute appoggiatura-resolution. Several of them are set against eighth-notes in another voice that are not harmonically coupled and thus to be played non legato, a challenge for judicious fingering. Moreover, appoggiaturas often develop out of tied notes, where they are even more easily overlooked.²

Ornaments in this fugue include the trills in CS1 and in the episode motifs Mcs1 and Mcs1a as well as the grace-notes in the final measure. All trills begin on the upper neighbor note, shake in 32nd-notes (i.e., twice as fast as the faster regular note values in the piece, the 16th-notes), and end without a change of speed in the suffixes Bach spells out. Each trill thus comprises eight notes. The grace-notes in m. 100 represent appoggiaturas. As their notation in brackets indicates, they derive not from the manuscript but from a copy. Ending the fugue without these appoggiaturas gives it a very straightforward close, while playing them results in a more complete ending and recalls its emotional qualities. The duration of the appoggiaturas is that common in connection with dotted notes: one third of the ternary value. This gives each appoggiatura an eighth-note and leaves a quarter-note for its resolution.

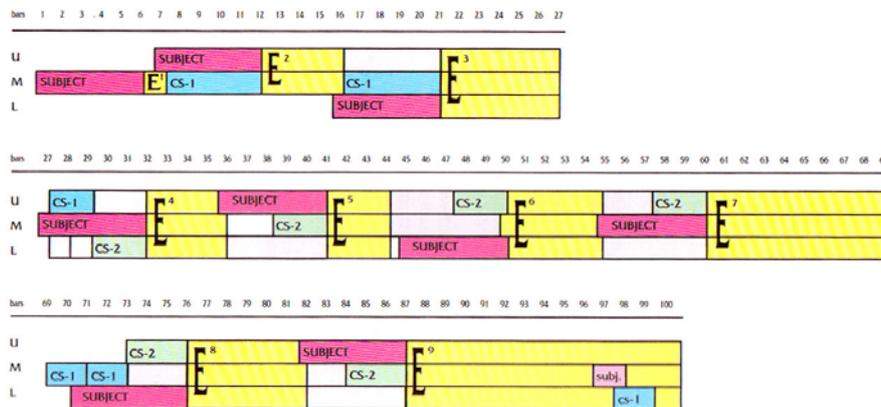
One word about the alternative readings given in the Urtext for mm. 16 and 21: The beginning of CS1 in M: m. 16 would sound meaningful in both versions, while closing the Ms sequence in U: m. 16₁ without a link to the tied F# seems structurally more logical. In m. 21, the alternative reading is strictly logical in the terms of the episode it opens, but may be perceived as interrupting the particularly close link between the preceding subject entry and the episode.

The structural layout of the fugue in B minor is supported by two groups of factors that complement one another to provide a clear pattern.

²The appoggiatura-resolution pairs in this fugue, in the order of their appearance:

mm:	15	18	20	33	34	35	43	50	51	52	53	54
voice:	M	U	U	M	U	M	U	M	M	M	M	M
notes:	B-A#	F#-E	D-C#	C#-B	F#-E	B-A	E-D	D-C#	C-B	E-D#	D-C#	F#-E#
mm:	77	79	87	88	89	90	92	93	94	95	96	
voice:	U	U	M	O	M	O	M	M	M	M	M	
notes:	G-A	F#-E	C-B	F#-E	B-A	E-D	G-F#	F-E	A-G#	G-F#	B-A#	

As mentioned above, the first three subject entries are accompanied exclusively by CS1, the fourth statement and all further full entries by CS2. This change defines the boundary between the first and the second sections. The entry in L: mm. 70-76 is singular since its beginning is not only varied but anticipated in another voice (see M: mm. 69-71₁). The sequence of this anticipation makes one believe to hear CS1 revived after a long absence. But the remainder of the subject is accompanied by CS2, the counter-subject “on duty” in this portion of the fugue. This exchange is reminiscent of that which in M: mm. 26-32 opens the second section.



The fugue thus consists of three sections: Section I covers twenty-six measures and contains a subject statement in each of the three voices. It ends, in the upper and lower voices, at m. 27₁, while the middle voice overlaps with the next subject entry beginning in m. 26. Section II is forty-two measures long and encompasses four subject statements. It concludes at m. 69₁. Section III begins in reduced ensemble after the downbeat of m. 69. It covers thirty-two measures with two complete entries. While it structurally retraces much of the layout presented in section II, it also features traits from section I, particularly regarding E8 and the recurrence of CS1 at the beginning and end of the section.

The characteristics that distinguish the three sections structurally by means of a change in the counter-subjects and the episode material also influence the varying intensity.

- Section I is characterized by a relatively high degree of polyphonic sophistication. The imitation of the subject’s initial subphrase in CS1 evokes the momentary impression of a stretto, while the close

relationship of the episode material in E2 and E3 allows for no real color contrast. The tension thus rises gradually, subdued only briefly in E1 and in the dynamically decreasing E2 with its descending sequences.

- Section II begins, overlapping with the end of section I and growing out of the ascending sequences of E3, on a fairly elevated level of tension. As soon as CS2 emerges and CS1 is abandoned (which means: at the moment when a polyphonic companion is substituted by a virtuoso accompaniment pattern), the earlier intensity gives way to extroverted playfulness. This is supported by the episodes, which invite contrasts in color owing to their unrelated material, and contrasts in mood, owing to their graceful suspension-resolution figures. Moreover, the tonal definition of the subject statements enhances this extroverted appeal insofar as two of them are in the major mode (see U: mm. 35-41 and L: mm. 44-50).
- Section III brings a return to the more intense character of the first section. Beginning in a setting of reduced voices and without any overlap with the previous material, it is launched as a genuine new beginning. In the further course of this section, the return of the counter-subject posing as a homophonic accompaniment pattern (CS2) and of the episodes in contrasting color—both characteristics of section II—suggests a return to the more outgoing mood. E9 combines a diminuendo in the descending sequences of the original E4 with a crescendo in the ascending lines of the original E6. This inverted dynamic curve is then topped by the incomplete subject statement that retrieves, for the last time, the initial phrase of CS1. The fugue thus ends in a very confident mood.