

10 – Fugue Structure

Fugues are not so much a form into which notes are poured as a process involving imitation, nevertheless most fugues do share some common structural elements. This chapter will focus on one of Bach’s finest fugues as a lesson in how fugues are approached analytically. The following fugue is a four-voice fugue. Most of Bach’s fugues are in either three or four voices, although some have five or even six voices. One fugue in the WTC is in only two voices, although this is quite unusual. The first major section of a fugue is called the exposition, because it presents the subject, answer and any counter-subjects in each voice in turn. In Bach’s fugue the exposition is 7 measures long and starts with the subject in the alto voice. This subject has a “head and tail” quality, and the “tail” is extensively used independently throughout the fugue.

Ex. 10-1 Bach: Fugue No 16 from the WTC, Book I – Exposition section

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with a measure number in the left margin:

- System 1 (Measures 1-3):** Labeled "EXPOSITION". Measure 1 shows the "Subject" in the alto voice. Measure 2 shows the "Answer (tonal)" in the soprano voice. Measure 3 shows the "Counter Subject" in the alto voice.
- System 2 (Measures 4-6):** Measure 4 shows the "Counter Subject" in the soprano voice. Measure 5 shows "Free counterpoint" in the soprano voice. Measure 6 shows the "Subject" in the alto voice.
- System 3 (Measures 7-8):** Labeled "MIDDLE SECTION". Measure 7 shows the "Answer (tonal)" in the soprano voice. Measure 8 shows the "Counter Subject" in the alto voice. A "Dmi: IAC" (Diminished triad: I, A, C) is indicated below the bass line.

Additional annotations include "Bridge (based on tail of sub.)" above measures 4-6 and "Episode 1 (based on tail of sub.)" above measure 8.

After the subject ends the *answer* is stated in the soprano voice. Since the subject began with scale degree 5 this subject requires a tonal answer. The music that continues in the alto voice beneath the answer can be called either a *free counterpoint* or a *counter-subject*. The difference being that a *counter-subject returns with subsequent statements of the subject or answer*. In bar

5 in the soprano the same passage returns in the key of G minor, not D minor as in bar 3. It also can be found in the bass voice in bar 7. Since this material returns in accompaniment to later subjects and answers it is termed a *counter-subject* and not a free counterpoint.

In bar 5 the third voice (bass) enters with the subject in the key of G minor again. The counter-subject is heard in the soprano and the alto is stating a free counterpoint. At the end of bar 6 the tenor voice enters with the answer, while the bass states the countersubject and the alto continues with a free counterpoint. In a four-voice fugue the voices enter with Subject – Answer – Subject – Answer. In a three-voice fugue of course the last answer statement is omitted. Sometimes in a three-voice fugue however there will be an *additional* statement of the answer which can make it appear to be a four-voice fugue.

Bar 4 in this exposition is a passage called a *bridge*. A bridge is a short section that follows the answer and modulates from the dominant key back to the original tonic. Although not every fugue has a bridge many do. Since the answer is in the dominant and the subject which follows must be in the tonic key, the connection is may be too abrupt. A bridge passage will help smooth over what would otherwise be an awkward spot. If, as in this fugue, the answer cadences securely in the dominant (at beat 1 of bar 4) a bridge will usually be required. Harmonically this passage replaces the leading tone of D minor (C#) with C natural, which helps set up the return to G minor in bar 5. When analyzing a *bridge* passage the source of the melodic material used in the bridge should be listed. In this case the higher voice in bar 4 is clearly related to the “tail” portion of the subject.

Fugues can start with any voice as the first voice but it is most typical for the last voice to be an outer voice, which enables the last statement to be heard more easily. In this fugue however the fourth voice to enter is the tenor part. This exposition is a bit unusual in that at no point do all four voices sound together. In bars 6 & 7 the soprano voice drops out. It isn't until bars 15-18 that true four-voice counterpoint occurs. This ebb and flow of voices is typical of four and more voice fugues, it makes it easier on both the performer and listener to vary the thickness of the texture.

The three major sections in a fugue are called the *exposition, middle section, and final section*. The middle section begins at the end of the exposition and is not hard to locate as it is also the last note of the answer. The end of the exposition is rarely marked by a significant cadence. In this fugue the cadence on the downbeat of bar 8 is very weak indeed.

The *middle section* of a fugue (sometimes called the *development*) usually starts with a passage of music called an *episode*. The most salient point about an episode is that a complete statement of the subject or answer is not present. Instead fragments of the subject or counter-subject will be heard, often in sequential passages, that modulate to a closely related key. Episodes alternate with *middle entry* statements in the middle section. A middle entry is a restatement of the entire subject, usually in a closely related key to the tonic. Sometimes it may be a single statement of the subject (accompanied by the counter-subject if there was one) in a new key, or it may be two or more statements of subjects and answers in this new key. The entire middle section will usually consist of a few alternations of episodes with middle entries.

The *final section* of a fugue is near the end, and must include one or more statements of the subject in the original key. This section is not usually hard to identify, but in some fugues the original key may reappear in the middle section of the fugue, which can confuse the issue. If the original key returns somewhere near the end and no other modulations follow then it is usually the final section. A final episode may occur in the final section as it does in this fugue.

Ex. 10-2 Bach: Fugue No 16 from the WTC, Book I – Middle section

MIDDLE SECTION
Episode 1 (based on tail of sub.)

8) Dmi: IAC Gmi: PAC

11) Middle Entry 1 in Bb Subject
False Entry BbMa: PAC Counter Subject Subject in answer form

14) Counter Subject Subject (in F Maj) Counter Subject

17) Counter Subject Episode 2 (based on tail of sub.)
Subject (altered) Subject (in Bb) Stretto (quasi) BbMa: IAC

The first episode in this fugue’s middle section lasts four measures and cadences in the relative major, Bb. The lower voices of this episode are drawn from the tail of the fugue subject, while the upper voice uses a three 16th note figure linking a chain of suspensions together.

Ex. 10-2 Bach: Fugue No 16 from the WTC, Book I – Middle section (continued)

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 20-23) features a treble clef staff with a 'Middle Entry 2 in Cmi' and a bass clef staff with a 'Subject (in Cmi)'. The second system (measures 23-26) includes a treble clef staff with a 'Counter Subject' and 'Episode 3 (based on figure from Ep. 1)', and a bass clef staff with a 'Subject (in Gmi)' and '(bass based on tail of Sub)'. The third system (measures 26-29) shows a treble clef staff with 'Sequence leg 1' and 'Sequence leg 2', and a bass clef staff with 'Sequence leg 3' and 'FINAL SECTION' containing 'Subject' and 'Subjects in Stretto'. The key signature is B-flat major/C minor.

In measure 11 the bass voice plays a figure that evokes the “head” of the subject. But since it doesn’t state the entire subject it is called a “false entry.” This false entry leads to a solid perfect authentic cadence (PAC) in bar 12. The first middle entry passage begins in bar 12 in the key of Bb major. This middle entry passage contains four statements of the subject, the middle two of which are in F major. In bar 17 the alto voice states an altered version of the subject before the bass voice has finished stating the subject. Overlapping statements of subjects or answers is called *stretto* and is a favorite device of fugue composers, but not all fugues contain stretto. This first middle entry passage ends in a mild IAC on beat 3 of bar 18 and is followed by episode 2. Episode 2 is brief, lasting only until bar 20 at which point the second middle entry passage begins. This episode modulates from Bb to C minor by introducing the note Ab and later the leading tone of C minor, B natural.

Middle entry 2 contains three complete statements of the subject, two in C minor and a third in G minor. As before the counter-subject accompanies these statements of the

subject. Middle entry 2 concludes with a PAC in G minor in measure 24 and is followed by episode 3. Unlike most fugal episodes, episode 3 doesn't actually modulate, it starts and ends in G minor. The melodic content of episode 3 again features the tail of the subject in the bass staff, but the upper voices toss back and forth the three-note figure first heard in episode 1. Episode 3 is the best example in this fugue of the sequential nature of many episodic passages. Starting at beat 3 of bar 24 the music in the next four beats is repeated a third lower at beat 3 of bar 25, and a third lower again at beat 3 of bar 26. These four beat long sequential "legs" are seen most clearly in the bass voice of this three-voice texture, but the two upper voices are also sequenced in precisely the same way. The VI chord in G minor is reached at beat 3 of bar 27 which becomes an Italian 6+ at the end of the bar leading to a very emphatic half cadence at the downbeat of bar 28. The b6 to 5 motion in the bass line used to approach this dominant chord is the reason this type of cadence is sometimes called a "Phrygian half-cadence."

The final section of this fugue commences immediately after this half cadence with a powerful statement of the subject, once again in G minor, in three way *stretto*.

Ex. 10-3 Bach: Fugue No 16 from the WTC, Book I – Final section

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system, labeled 'FINAL SECTION', covers measures 28 to 30. Measure 28 is marked 'Gmi: HC' and shows a half cadence. Measures 29 and 30 are marked 'Subjects in Stretto' and feature overlapping entries of the subject. The second system, labeled 'CODA (add'l voices)', covers measures 31 to 33. Measure 31 is marked 'Subject' and shows the subject in the upper voice. Measure 32 is marked 'Counter Subject' and shows the counter-subject in the lower voice. Measure 33 is marked 'Subject' and shows the subject in the upper voice. The third system, labeled 'G: PAC', covers measure 34 and shows a perfect authentic cadence in G minor.

Following this exciting stretto passage a fourth episode ensues, which like the others, uses the “tail” of the subject as its melodic basis. Since it is in the final section this episode doesn’t modulate, but does tonicize the subdominant chord (C minor) at the start of bar 31. This leads to another statement of the subject in the alto, with the countersubject in accompaniment in the bass in bar 32. In this analysis the last two measures are labeled as a coda, which some fugues have, but not all. The tenor states the subject one final time, but to add to the sense of finality Bach thickens the harmony with additional voices in the treble staff as well as surrounding the subject with a descending eighth note line in parallel tenths in the outer voices. The fugue concludes with a very satisfying PAC complete with a Picardy third with the “tail” of the subject leading very neatly to the major third of the final chord.

Other Fugal Possibilities

The Bach G minor fugue just discussed is held up as a particularly “scholastic” fugue, meaning one which has all the traditional features in the usual order. Some other possibilities that are found in fugues include a *counter-exposition*. This is a passage that follows the opening exposition and once again has each voice stating the fugue subject and answer in the tonic and dominant keys. The only difference is that the first voice in the counter-exposition will normally have some sort of accompaniment in one or more other voices rather than having the other voices drop out. The fugue in F Major from the WTC Book I has a counter-exposition.

Some fugues start with an accompaniment to the subject, usually in the bass voice. This is true of most of Bach’s *Three Part Inventions*, which are in fact three voice fugues with an accompaniment under the initial statement of the subject and answer. Example 10-4 shows Bach’s Three-Part Invention No. 3 which has an accompaniment to the subject and answer. The fugue subject is a nice example of compound melody, and also this subject includes a *link* at the end of the subject. The bass accompaniment continues throughout the answer and connects smoothly to the statement of the subject in the bass voice in bar 6.

Ex. 10-4 Bach: Three Part Invention, No. 3

Some fugues make use of the canonic devices discussed in the chapter on canons, including contrary motion, augmentation and diminution. When these occur in a fugue they are usually found in the middle section. The C minor fugue from the WTC Book II impressively combines an augmented form of the subject with the subject as well as the answer in contrary motion in the middle section. This is seen in Ex. 10-5b. Example 10-5a shows the entire exposition of this 3 voice fugue, once again with a tonal answer and a bridge linking the end of the answer with the beginning the restatement of the subject in the bass. The bridge consists of a chain of 2-3 suspensions modulating from G minor back to the V chord in C minor.

Ex. 10-5b Bach: Fugue No. 2 in C minor from WTC Book 2 – Exposition

Ex. 10-5b Bach: Fugue No. 2 in C minor from WTC Book 2 – Middle Section, bars 14-15

Double Fugues

A double fugue is a fugue with two subjects. In the clearest examples of double fugues one will find an exposition on a first subject, followed by episodes and so forth. At some point another exposition will interrupt the fugue based on a new subject, which may in turn be followed by its own middle section. The key ingredient though is a passage in which the two independent fugue subjects are combined and heard at the same time. Double fugues following this design include Bach's Fugue 18 from the WTC Book 1, and Fugue 4 from the WTC Book 2. Two important 20th century compositions are also fine examples of double fugues following this design, Paul Hindemith's *Symphony in Bb for Band*, Movement 3 as well as the second movement of Igor Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*.

Another type of double fugue is one in which the two subjects are anything but independent. In this sort of double fugue the two subjects are announced together at the outset of the fugue and are heard in tandem until the end. Examples of this include the fugue from Handel's *Messiah* "And with his Stripes," the Kyrie from Mozart's *Requiem*, and the third movement of the *German Requiem* by Johannes Brahms.