

Fugue

(Johann Sebastian Bach)

Fugue

- ▶ In order to demonstrate their skill in the use of counterpoint, Baroque composers and performers were often asked to improvise or compose *fugues*
- ▶ Bach and Handel wrote many fugues
- ▶ Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* features 48 fugues—one for each major and minor key, twice!
- ▶ Another collection of fugues is found in one of Bach's latest works: *The Art of the Fugue*—here he demonstrates nearly every kind of fugal technique possible

Fugue

- ▶ A fugue involves the contrapuntal working out of a theme, called a **subject**
- ▶ A fugue is more of a *process* than a definite *form*—many things can happen to the subject in a fugue
- ▶ In general, the subject is first presented in the *exposition*, followed by episodes, re-entries of the subject, and an eventual conclusion

The Subject

- ▶ An effective fugue subject has distinctive pitch or rhythmic elements that make it stand out from its surroundings
- ▶ Subjects vary in length, range, intervallic content, rhythmic shape, and character
- ▶ Some subjects start and end in the tonic, while others move to the dominant
- ▶ Subjects often have a clear harmonic structure and clear sense of direction

The Answer

- ▶ After the subject is stated in one voice, the **answer** appears in a second voice
- ▶ The answer is stated at the interval of a perfect fifth above (or fourth below) the subject
- ▶ A *real answer* is intervallically the same as the subject, in the key of the dominant
- ▶ A *tonal answer* is intervallically altered for tonal reasons

The Exposition

- ▶ The **exposition** of a fugue follows a clear pattern:
 - ▶ First, the *subject* is stated in the tonic
 - ▶ A second voice enters with the subject in the dominant (the *answer*) as the first voice continues with new material
 - ▶ This process continues in the order subject – answer – subject – answer until all of the voices have stated the subject (or answer)
 - ▶ At this point, the exposition is complete
 - ▶ Some expositions feature an additional statement of the subject in the tonic after all of the voices have stated it—this is termed a *redundant entry*

Bridges

- ▶ Sometimes there is a **bridge** that occurs after the first answer and before the second statement of the subject
- ▶ Its purpose is to modulate back to the tonic for the entry of the subject
- ▶ It “bridges the gap” between the end of the answer and the following subject

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The Countersubject

- ▶ When the second voice enters, the first voice may continue with *free counterpoint*
- ▶ But if the melodic line that appears with the second entry is used consistently against the subject throughout the fugue, we call it a **countersubject**
- ▶ Countersubjects often complement the rhythm and shape of the subject
- ▶ A fugue may have multiple countersubjects

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Invertible Counterpoint

- ▶ For a subject and countersubject to work well together, they must be written in *invertible counterpoint*
- ▶ Invertible counterpoint means that if the positions of the two lines are reversed, the intervals between them are still consonant and usable
- ▶ Lines in an upper voice must also be able to function well as a lower voice

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The Episode

- ▶ **Episodes** occur after the exposition and between re-entries of the subject
- ▶ There are no complete statements of the subject in an episode
- ▶ However, motives from the subject and countersubject(s) might appear in the episodes
- ▶ Sequences, modulation, and invertible counterpoint are common in episodes

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Re-entries

- ▶ A **re-entry** is when the complete subject returns after an episode
- ▶ These re-entries will present one or more statements of the subject, often in keys other than the tonic
- ▶ Middle entries might also feature changes of mode or the use of contrapuntal devices such as *stretto* (overlapping entries of the subject)
- ▶ Other contrapuntal devices are *augmentation* (subject played twice as slow), *diminution* (twice as fast), and *melodic inversion* (subject upside-down)

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The Conclusion

- ▶ Most fugues have a final statement (or a set of statements) of the subject at the end, creating the conclusion
- ▶ This final statement could occur before or after the final cadence of the fugue
- ▶ Sometimes the final statement occurs over a dominant or tonic pedal tone

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Less typical features of fugues

- ▶ Some fugues feature more than one subject—these are called *double*, *triple*, and *quadruple fugues*
 - ▶ Two subjects might be paired together from the outset
 - ▶ In longer fugues, each subject might have its own separate exposition before the subjects are combined
- ▶ In some fugues, there is a redundant entry in every voice (creating twice as many as is needed)—this kind of fugue is said to have a *counter-exposition*

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