

## The Invention

(Johann Sebastian Bach)

### The Invention

- ▶ Bach wrote 15 keyboard pieces for two voices which he called “inventions”
  - ▶ He also wrote 15 three-voice inventions (which he calls “sinfonias”)
- ▶ These pieces take a simple motive (or a small group of motives) called “the subject” and spin it out using imitation and other variation techniques
- ▶ Each of the inventions has its own unique way of working out its basic materials—Bach is inventing!

### Episodes and Re-entries

- ▶ At the beginning of the piece, the complete subject is introduced
- ▶ When the subject is not being presented in any voice, it is called an *episode*
  - ▶ During episodes, pieces of the subject are often being developed
  - ▶ Harmonic sequences and modulations are common in episodic passages
- ▶ When the full subject returns, it is called a *re-entry*

### Invention Techniques

- ▶ Here are a few techniques used in the inventions
  - ▶ The subject is often imitated and repeated in sequences
  - ▶ The subject is often inverted and it may also be fragmented or extended
  - ▶ Sometimes there is a recurring *countersubject* that accompanies the subject
  - ▶ The subject and countersubject are often written using *invertible counterpoint*, meaning that the parts can be switched (with one moving above or below the other) and the intervals will still be consonant—it will “still work”

### Invertible counterpoint

- ▶ Here is a passage of invertible counterpoint:

- ▶ When inverted at the octave (as here), sixths become thirds and thirds become sixths, but fifths become... dissonant fourths!
- ▶ Therefore, fifths on strong beats are avoided in invertible counterpoint