

Fugue No. 5

D Major

Well-Tempered Clavier Book I

Johann Sebastian Bach

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Subject: Fugue No. 5, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I

Imagine the opulent Hall of Mirrors at Versailles and the grandeur of Louis XIV, *le Roi-Soleil*. This elegant fugue in the French *manier* belongs there, with the gilded candelabras and sparkling chandeliers. Its subject, worthy of the Sun King himself, begins with a flourish and concludes with the stately dotted rhythms we have come to associate with the house of Bourbon and its music of the high baroque.

The *raison d'être* for this fugue is its flourish. This roulade seems the musical equivalent of a courtly bow or any number of ballet-like gestures associated with the French social graces. It achieves a more grandiloquent expression in m. 20 and again in m. 24.

The flourish itself can be divided into two parts of equal length. It begins with a rising tetrachord and concludes with a combination of neighbor-tone to a consonant a skip. I have labeled these motives z and n:

Motive z = rising tetrachord

Motive n = neighbor & skip

Most of this fugue consists of fragmentation of the two motives in the subject's head motive (the flourish). Motive z is melodically inverted in the subject's tail.

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Here instead of rising, the tetrachord falls. The tail achieves its climax in a dramatic descent of the bass voice in mm. 25-27.

Bach has applied his most artful development to motive n. Study the timeline. Can you locate the first instance of n that has not been immediately preceded by z? (Hint: it is in the exposition). Yes, that would be on the last beat of m. 3. Notice that the durations have been doubled. The rhythmic augmentation of motive n achieves its climax in the modulating sequences of mm. 9-10 and mm. 17-19.

There are many reasons why Bach's music has survived the test of time. Among them is his ability to synthesize the stylistic impulses of his day and apply to them a craftsmanship equaled by few of his contemporaries. In this case the fusion is that of the *stile Francese* with solid north German counterpoint and fugue.