

BACH: THE ART OF THE FUGUE, Vol. I / Fugues Nos. 1-9

Glenn Gould, Organist

Recorded on the organ at All Saints' Church, Kingsway, Toronto, Canada

Produced by Joseph Scianni

Bach began composing his *Art of the Fugue* in 1746 or 1749 and continued to work on it in 1750, the last year of his life. He had finished three-fourths of Fugue No. 15 when a severe eye disease obliged him to leave off work on his artistic last will and testament and undergo an operation. A combination of primitive medical techniques and a blundering doctor proved fatal; within six months of this operation Bach was dead. He spent his last years in a darkened room, alone with the God he had served and glorified all his life. When he felt death close upon him he sent for his son-in-law, the musician Altnikol, and dictated to him not the conclusion of the great B-A-C-H fugue but a cheerful Lullaby on the melody "When We Are in Deepest Need," telling Altnikol to entitle it "I Draw Near Unto Thy Throne." In the manuscript we can see all the passages that the sick man had to permit himself; "Albert Schweitzer narrates: 'the drying ink becomes more watery from day to day; the notes written in the twilight, with the windows closely curtained, can hardly be deciphered.'"

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Bach saw the first eleven fugues through the engraving process, but the remainder of the editorial work was done by his two eldest sons and the theologist Marburg. The edition came out in 1751; by 1756 the copies had been sold and so C.P.E. Bach sold the plates of his father's last work for the value of the metal. The editors of this first edition made at least one palpable mistake by printing a variant of Fugue No. 10 as a separate fugue. Bach undoubtedly intended to discard this variant. Other questions arise to plague the editor and the performer. What part were the four long but not very interesting two-part canons to play in the entire scheme? Did Bach intend them for this work or for a projected *Art of the Canon*? Do the double-keyboard transcriptions of the two parts of Fugue No. 13 belong to the series, or did Bach intend them as practical realizations, virtuoso pieces to be performed rather than studied?

The most vexing problem, of course, is whether or not Bach intended the *Art of the Fugue* to be played at all. He does not once in the work indicate tempo or a dynamic marking. He does not indicate what instrument or instruments should play the work. He writes each of the voices on a separate staff (in so-called "open score"), which is very helpful for the student but anything but helpful for the keyboard player.

This leaves the field open to the arranger, and arrangers have eagerly rushed in. There are multiple versions for orchestra, for string quartet, for two pianos, for organ, for piano solo. Only the musical pedant can find the various realizations a source of annoyance; the genuine music lover will make his own choice or choices and take pleasure in the process. Whatever choice he makes, the *Art of the Fugue* remains massively and imperitably itself. For though it is devoid neither of humanity nor emotion, the human and the emotional are not its real concern. Like the figures on Keats's urn, it has passed out of time and accident, and wears the changeless beauty of pure thought.

Since the *Art of the Fugue* is the greatest treatise on the subject of the fugue in existence (a treatise that teaches through example rather than through precept), a few of the basic definitions of fugal composition ought to be set down here in rudimentary fashion, to help the uninitiated listener in his journey through this splendid edifice. SUBJECT: this is the theme upon which a fugue is constructed (in the case of the *Art of the Fugue*, the first eleven notes); a fugue may be constructed on more than one subject, and therefore be a double, triple, or quadruple fugue. ANSWER: when the first voice (or part) has finished stating the subject, a second voice takes it up ("imitates" it) either at a higher or a lower pitch—the "answer." COUNTERSUBJECT: meanwhile the first voice continues with new material which is played against ("counters") the answer; if this material takes on definite shape and form (rather than being merely an accompaniment or counterpoint to the answer) and if it plays some part in the future development of the fugue, it is labeled "countersubject"; a fugue may have several countersubjects or none at all. EXPOSITION: when the subject or its answer has appeared at least once in each voice (three times in a three-voiced fugue, five times in a five-voiced fugue, etc.) we have arrived at the end of the first section, or the first exposition. EPISODE: the next section, or episode, does not present a complete statement of the subject, but makes free use of portions of the subject or its continuation (countersubject); frequently the episodes of a fugue provide relief from the stricter expositions.

These are the major phenomena of the fugue. It only remains to mention a few of the common devices with which composers manipulate their subjects and countersubjects as a fugue progresses. DIMINUTION: presenting the subject at twice its original speed. AUGMENTATION: presenting the subject at half its original speed, or twice as slowly. INVERSION: turning the notes of the original subject in the opposite direction, thereby giving it an intriguing quality of unfamiliar familiarity; for instance, the original subject upon which the entire *Art of the Fugue* is built looks like this:



but when Bach inverts it, it looks like this:



One final important device is STRETTO, or starting the answer before the subject has had a chance to finish; the closer the answer does the steps of the subject, the greater is the listener's sense of urgency and excitement (the Italian word *stretto* means "tight" or "squeezed together" and often has the overtone of "just by a hair's breadth").

Now, if you will, enter the rarefied atmosphere of the *Art of the Fugue*, this "still and serious work" as the composer called it, "deserted and rigid, without color, without light, without motion; it does not gladden, does not distract; yet we cannot break away from it." Follow it with an open score, if you can, so that you can see all the intricate crossings and interweavings, "instinct through all proportions low and high," the living brain of the structure, fantastically complicated and beautiful as a drop of busy microscopic life seen through a powerful lens. Finally you will put your score away, however, and the infinitude of detail will be subsumed by the massive unity of the thing, the microscopic will give way to the cosmic, its inevitable oblivion. And you may ask yourself if the fragmentary state of the fifteenth fugue is merely the outcome of blind fate—or if it represents the limits placed upon the artist's fulfillment in the face of an otherwise limitless craving. Perhaps the rest indeed is silence.

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"The foremost pianist this continent has produced in recent decades," wrote critic Alfred Frankenstein in *High Fidelity* Magazine. "A pianist of divine guidance," added Jay Harrison in the *New York Herald Tribune*. A distinguished European critic, Heinrich Neuhaus, noted that he plays Bach "as if he were one of the pupils of the Thomasschule cantor." The music seems to speak through his playing. Such is the praise that has greeted each appearance of Glenn Gould, the distinguished Canadian pianist, who now adds new laurels to his crown as an organist. Mr. Gould began studying the organ as a young boy. When he was only fourteen he appeared in the Casavant Series at Eaton Auditorium in Toronto, which each year brought to that city five of the world's finest organists. Although the piano is now Glenn Gould's major medium as a performer, it is brilliantly evident from this recording of the *Art of the Fugue* that he is also a master of Bach's royal instrument.

STEREO

BACH/GLENN GOULD THE ART OF THE FUGUE

VOLUME I (FIRST HALF) FUGUES 1-9

RECORDED ON THE ORGAN

AT ALL-SAINTS' ANGLICAN CHURCH, TORONTO, CANADA



SIDE 1 FUGUES NOS. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

THE SELECTIONS (PUBLIC DOMAIN) ARE FOLLOWED BY THEIR FINESSES

1707

COVER PHOTO: DAVID BARNES, CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

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Johann Sebastian Bach 1685–1750

The Art of Fugue BWV 1080 (excerpts)

Die Kunst der Fuge (Auszüge) · L'Art de la fugue (extraits)

1	Contrapunctus I	2:44
2	Contrapunctus II	2:42
3	Contrapunctus III	2:20
4	Contrapunctus IV	3:19
5	Contrapunctus V	2:53
6	Contrapunctus VI, a 4, im Stile francese	4:56
7	Contrapunctus VII, a 4, per Augmentationem et Diminutionem	3:44
8	Contrapunctus VIII, a 3	4:51
9	Contrapunctus IX, a 4, alla Duodecima	3:04

Total Time 30:35

Glenn Gould organ

Original LP: MS 6338 / ML 5738 · Released May 14, 1962

Recording: All Saints' Anglican Church, Toronto, January 31 & February 1/2/4/21, 1962;

Chapel of the Theological College, New York City, February 21, 1962

Producer: Joseph Scianni

Cover Photo: Dave Barnes, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

Liner Notes: David Johnson

LP Matrix: XSM 56193 [1–5], XSM 56194 [6–9] (stereo);

xLP 56191 [1–5], xLP 56192 [6–9] (mono)

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