

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

A Selective Analysis of Prelude no. 3 from Book 1 of J.S. Bach's Well Tempered Clavier With a Brief Outline of "JSB": a Reimagined Interpretation

By Dr. Jonathan Saraga

TOPIC

This paper will explore the theory and rhetoric behind select sonic occurrences within Johann Sebastian Bach's Prelude No. 3 in C# Major from his Well-Tempered Clavier Book 1. In addition, as a secondary component to this research, I will briefly show how the prelude was adapted and re-imagined for modern-day jazz quartet instrumentation by Grammy-nominated MacArthur Fellow and saxophonist, Miguel Zenon. This supplement will finalize the paper, and is written in support of a live presentation and performance of the Zenon piece, titled "J.S.B."

INTRODUCTION

Originally written in C, and later adjusted to read in a 7-sharped key signature, Prelude No. 3 is only one of 48 that J.S. Bach conceived between 1722 and 1742. While it is common knowledge that he is not the first to attempt writing a collection of pieces in all major and minor keys, the Well Tempered Clavier is a prime example of his unrelenting contribution to the gamut of "artistic and technical possibilities inherent in almost every genre of his time except opera."¹ Book 1's Prelude in C# Major is a sophisticated and elegant musical exercise that contains an incredible amount of information for an etude of just over 100 measures. Zenon's 471 measure (575 mm. when recorded with repeated sections) interpretation and expansion preserves the harmonic and stylistic essence of the original, while tastefully expounding upon form, and seamlessly incorporating improvisation and non-Western rhythmic devices.

BACKGROUND

¹ Wikipedia contributors, "Johann Sebastian Bach," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Johann_Sebastian_Bach&oldid=776880617(accessed April 30, 2017).

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

Sebastian Bach completed Book 1 of his Well Tempered Clavier in 1722, while still living in Cöthen, Germany. He had not yet moved to Leipzig to begin his work as a Kantor and educator. It is interesting to note that the two books of the WTC were completed nearly 20 years apart, and although the key centers and forms of the 12 pieces written in each collection are virtually identical, the musically content is not at all, and is reflective of the artist's personal state during each time period. During the majority of the six years that he resided in Cöthen, Bach's resources, salary, rapport, and overall quality of life for himself and his family was quite optimal, and provided most likely some of the best conditions a composer of his time could have asked for. However, within the latter two years of that period, a shift started to occur. His wife passed unexpectedly in 1720, and around the same time of his remarriage a year and a half later², his employer, Prince Leopold, "married a Princess who was known for her ignorance in music. Because of this situation at the court of Cöthen, he had never felt so awkward to remain in his position and so, by the end of that year, he had already made up his mind and sought a post in Leipzig."³ While his *St. John's Passion* oratorio seems to be the piece that marked his final transition to Leipzig where he would not only compose hundreds of sacred works but also cultivate his relationship with God,⁴ WTC Book 1 is certainly a vital part of the process and path leading up to that point, and Bach's arrival at a new chapter in his life.

CONTENT

After surveying analyses by Siglind Bruhn and Dr. Hugo Reimann, among other Bach and classical music scholars, it is clear that the extent to which the structure of this work can be dissected and opinionated is limitless. My findings are not in complete agreement with what such experts as Bruhn or Reimann have

² Timothy A Smith, Cothen (1717-1723), Sojourn, <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/tas3/cothen.html> (last updated 1996, accessed April 29th, 2017).

³ Yo Tomita, History of Conception and Revision Process: The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1, <http://www.music.qub.ac.uk/tomita/essay/wtc1.html> (last updated 1996, accessed April 29th, 2017).

⁴ Joseph Heri, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism, Choir, Congregation, and Three Centuries of Conflict*, (New York: Oxford University Press) 123.

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

concluded, and by no means credit the depth of the work to the entirety of which it deserves. Instead, my analysis will touch on three essential elements of the musical construction within this particular composition, along with a few supporting examples. Along those same lines, my later analysis of Zenon's "JSB" will not be overly particular either, but instead will provide a straightforward explanation of his re-arrangement process. Each section below will discuss select elements of the form of the prelude and their relation to the prelude as a whole.

OVERALL DESIGN

The prelude's 104 measures can be divided up into 5 sections to include Primary Themes (in both major and minor tonalities as it were), Transitional Material, Interludes (as I call them), short Tags (as I call them), and a Closing section. The most detailed division is seen below which includes 13 sections. See figure

1.1

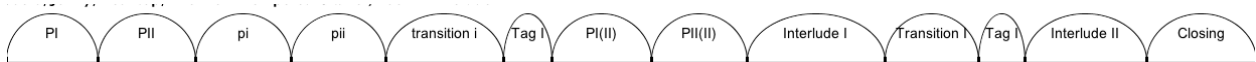


Figure 1:1

One of the most compelling aspects of this composition and of many by J.S. Bach is an underlying sense of forward motion. There is never a true moment of rest within this piece, despite abundant tonicization and cadential closures. While musically, each section's content serves and functions in-and-of itself, and in relation to all other sections, the gravitational pull towards a point further along from the present moment is effervescent. It is for this reason that I have chosen to identify each section's "purpose", as you will see below, as a means of describing its place within the impending arrival of an eventual end. Johann's ability to create this propulsion comes from his polished ability to combine and manipulate aspects of form. This concept will be discussed in depth in the following section. For now, let's take a look at the anatomy of the prelude. See

Figure 1.2.

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

Figure 1.2

PI: Key: C# Maj | Length: 8 Bars | Purpose: Moving Toward PII | Chords: I | ii | I | IV | I | ii | I | (V7/V)
PII: Key: G# Maj | Length: 8 Bars | Purpose: Moving Toward pi | Chords: I | ii | I | IV | I | ii | I | (V7/V)
pi: Key: d# min | Length: 8 Bars | Purpose: Moving Towards pii | Chords: i | iiø7 | i | iv | i | V7 | i | (V7b9/V)
pii: Key: a# min | Length: 8 Bars | Purpose: Moving Toward Transition | Chords: i | iiø7 | i | iv | i | V7 | i | (V7/V)
tri: Key: Various Related Key Centers | Length: 10 Bars | Purpose: Rapid Tonicization/Building of Tension Toward Second Half of Piece | Chords: e#- | d#- | a#- | g#- | d#-
1. E# - : Relative Minor of the Dominant (G#)
2. D# - : Relative Minor of the Subdominant (F#)
3. A# - : Relative Minor of the Tonic (C#)
4. G# Maj: Dominant of the Tonic (C#)
5. D# - : Relative Minor of the Subdominant (F#)
Tag: Key: Going to F# Major | Length: 4 Bars | Purpose: Sets up Second Half of Piece | Chords: C# | D#7 | A#-7 | C#7
PI(II): Key: F# Maj | Length: 8 Bars | Purpose: Leads to PII(II) | Chords: I | ii | I | IV | I | ii | I | (V7/V)
PII(II) Key: C# Maj | Length: 8 Bars | Purpose: Building Towards Dominant Lock 1 of 2 | Chords: I | ii | I | IV | I | ii | I | (V7/V)
Int: Key: C# Major | Length: 12 Bars | Purpose: Dominant Lock/Builds Tension Toward Transition | Chords: G# | C#/F# | G#7 | C# | C#o7 | G#
TrI: Key: Leading to C# minor | Length: 8 Bars | Purpose: Leads to the Parallel Minor | Chords: C# | A#7b9 | D#- | G#7b9
TagII: Key: C# minor/Going Towards Dominant Lock | Length: 4 Bars | Purpose: Sets up Dominant Lock | Chords: C# - | F# - | C# - | F#o7
IntII: Key: C# | Length: 10 Bars | Purpose: Dominant Lock/Sets up Closing | Chords: G# | C#/G# | G#7 | C#/G# | C#o7/G#
Closing: Key: C# Major | Length: 8 bars | Purpose: Closing | Chords: G#7b9 | C#o7 | G#7 | C#o7 | C# G#7 | C#

PHRASING, MOTIVES AND SEQUENCES

“Bach’s music with all of its eternally undulating flow of harmonic motion; with all its vast linear complication, seems to somehow suggest the suspended, perpetually transient, unknowing condition of man.”⁵ – Glenn Gould

Upon an in-depth study of this prelude, it became apparent that Bach not only mastered each of these components of musical construction, but that he thrived at the assimilation and conversion of them *into* music itself. Bach did not simply integrate these elements into the flow of the music, but conjoined them to create the essence the we have come to know as J.S. Bach. As these three components are all interconnected, you may find repetition of analysis of certain measures grouping within multiple sections.

PHRASING

⁵ Codonata, “Glenn Gould talks about JS Bach”, YouTube video, (8:00-8:14 of 33:39), Uploaded February 11th, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crQ8YEUKUjg>.

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

At times I was uncertain whether to mark divisions in form based on harmonic gravity/symmetry/contour, or melodic/rhythmic motion, as so often Bach disguises their interplay with a complex lust. In most phrases, cadences occur juxtaposed to melodic and rhythmic contour. In PI, PII, pi, pii, PI(II), and PII(II) for instance, cadences occur on bar 7 of the 8 bar phrase with the 8th bar serving as a “transitional” measure to the next phrase. An interesting thing to point out in the case of the P and p themes specifically is that if we view the motive as a 7 bar phrase, we see a type of palindrome created (mm. 1-7: C#, D#-, C# F#, C#, D#- C#); a technique that wouldn’t be widely explored for another 2 centuries nearly. Another example of this asymmetrical phrase-chain construction lies within the l(i)interludes, where the melodic and rhythmic pattern continues through and beyond the cadential arrival point, into what I deem as a short “tag.” (see mm. 43-46, and m. 75 coming out of the phrase in mm. 63-74). Mm. 43 could also be seen as an elision, as we reach the tonic at the beginning of the measure, however the contour of the line continues through and beyond that point.

Yet another way Bach disguises phrase divisions using melodic contour is through the rising and falling (in range) of melodic motives. Many times this motion occurs separately from the harmonic flow. For example, if we look at the 10 measure phrase from mm. 33-42, and following that, the 4 measure phrase from mm. 43-46, we can hear that these phrase groupings make sense due to the gravity of their harmonic motion, however melodically, the phrasing does not conform to the same shape. M. 39 although in a different key from m. 33, repeats the same melody in the same hand. To the ear it could sound as if mm. 39 started a new phrase, one that would mirror the one that began at 33. To make matters even more complicated, we see that the LH/RH relationship is shown in 4 bar ideas that occur starting in measure 35. (mm 35-38 – eighth notes in left hand), (mm. 39-42, eighth notes in right hand), and (mm. 43-46 – eighth notes in left hand). While symmetrical in-and-of itself, this pattern begins two measures *after* the start of the phrase (it starts at m. 35 not m. 33), leaving a mere 2 measure fragment to start the phrase.

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

Through this type of manipulation of musical elements, the prelude is filled with constant occurrences of 8, 10, 12, 4 and in the opinions of some, 6 or even 7 bar phrases. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find a single phrase that is clearly, and definitively either/or. As a result, we perceive a piece that has both elements of traditional melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic form but with the flavor of thru-composition; amidst the co-existence of a constant propulsion toward an immutable end as well as non-destination.

MOTIVES

One of the remarkable things about Bach's music is that he so precisely makes use of the full spectrum of Northern-European compositional vernacular, but does so in such an organic way; seemingly unplanned, and improvisational in nature. Of course, when speaking about Bach's usage of motives it is inevitable that phrase construction will be influenced, and vice-versa; they go hand in hand.

The motive found in mm. 63 – 74 (also used in m.75), is a one measure basic idea. The shape of the ideas in both hands remain consistent throughout that passage. When the phrase changes at m. 75 the content of the basic idea is slightly altered, and gives way toward new content. Notice how the left hand begins a new two measure motive mm. 77-78, which is then inverted in mm. 79-80, repeated in its original form again in mm. 81-82, and then fragmented in m. 83, (as new motives are introduced in both hands for another few bars (until m. 87). This demonstrates Bach's polished ability to weave motives in and out of phrases, regardless of their symmetry to harmonic or structural integrity.

Another example is the four measure motive that begins at m. 35. The phrase that this motive is a part of actually begins at m. 33 with a fragment of it; another interesting assimilation in itself. Beginning at m. 35, we have a four measure idea, which is then inverted and restated starting at m. 39. When we arrive at the 4 bar "tag" beginning at m. 43, the pattern (4 measure idea to same four measure idea, inverted) is restarted again, however, at this point the harmonic sequence that had been going on has ended. The fact that this 4

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

bar tag still includes prior motivic material, with a newly altered harmonic pull, allows the music to explode into m. 47, much more so than if the compositional elements at play were used symmetrically in conjunction with each other, as opposed to how they are used, which is contrapuntally. This overlapping or hemiola affect of motivic content-against harmonic content-against sequential content employed seemingly at will has such a profound effect. It not only propels the music forward, but also lends to the dramatic impact and sonic satisfaction of weighted arrival points.

SEQUENCES

While there are certainly more than three components that come together to create and sustain a music of such sophistication and creativity, sequences are among the more obvious elements this piece contains, most of which are juxtaposed with the other two elements already touched upon. Note that some of the sequences existent here differ from the sequences that conform to the standard definition (motives or ideas moving in ascending fifths, descending fifths, etc.), but instead embody whole phrases moving by a common interval. I have only offered instances in the form outline bellow (figure 2.1) where sequences occur, and have omitted sections that do not apply. I have not supplemented the outline below with any explanation, as it is assumed that the reader has some basic knowledge of music theory.

Figure 2.1

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

PI: Key: C# Maj | Length: 8 Bars

Tonality up a Perfect Fifth

PII: Key: G# Maj | Length: 8 Bars

Tonality moves up a Perfect Fifth

pi: Key: d# min | Length: 8 Bars

Tonality moves up a Perfect Fifth

pII: Key: a# min | Length: 8 Bars

Tonality moves up a Perfect Fifth

tri: **Down 2 Up 5 Sequence Occurs Within Tri** (Transition i) | Key: Various Related Minor Keys: e#- | d#- | a#- | g#- | d#- | Length: 10 Bars

1. E# - : Relative Minor of the Dominant (G#)

2. D# - : Relative Minor of the Subdominant (F#)

3. A# - : Relative Minor of the Tonic (C#)

4. G# Maj : Dominant of the Tonic (C#)

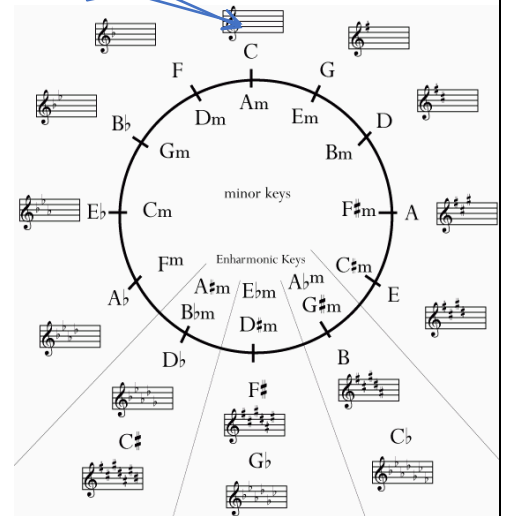
5. D# - : Relative Minor of the Subdominant (F#)

PI(II): Key: F# Maj | Length: 8 Bars

Tonality up a Perfect Fifth

PII(II) Key: C# Maj | Length: 8 Bars

Tonality up a Perfect Fifth



CONCLUSION

There is much to be recognized within Bach's compositional prowess, both within this prelude, and in each of the pieces whose manuscripts have survived. While the study of this prelude's compositional construction exudes a high level of creative intricacy, it also exhibits a child-like innocence; an imaginative freedom in which form is conceived and realized only through an iridescent lens. The effect of asymmetrical assimilation of sequential movement, melody, rhythm and harmony creates an effect of thru-composition within a confined system. This unique non-conformism combined with his adherence to the importance of theoretical integrity within the compositional vernacular of his time sets J.S. aside as a true genius of music.

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

“You see, (Johann Sebastian) Bach was music’s greatest non-conformist, and one of the supreme examples of that independence of the artistic conscience that stands quite outside the collective historical process.”⁶ – Glenn Gould

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR “JSB” SUPPLEMENT

⁶ Codonata, “Glenn Gould talks about JS Bach”, YouTube video, (2:58-3:10 of 33:39), Uploaded February 11th, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crQ8YEUKUjg>.

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL ~ "JSB" Comparative Analysis

See figure 3.1 below. A brief explanation of each section to be discussed during presentation:

3.1: Entire 575 measure division of "JSB"



Piece is in Db, the enharmonic of C#

- 1) Intro: 8 measure drum intro
- 2) A: Entire form of prelude in it's enharmonic, Db
- 3) B: Interlude | Keys: Ab Maj ~ A Maj ~ Bb Maj
- 4) C: Piano solo | Entire Form of Prelude Transposed up a Whole-Step to Eb
- 5) D: Interlude: Sequence of 4 – 3 measure groupings as such:
4 (Bb/D) | 3 (Db/F) | 4 (G/B) | 3 (C/E) | 3 (Ab/A) | 4 (F#/F) | 3 (B/C) | 3 (Ab/G) | 3 (B/G) | 4 (A/B) | 3 (C#/E) | 3 (C/B) | 4 (C#/B) | 2 (C# w/G# in bass) | 2 (F# w/G# in bass) |

Chord symbols in prentices indicate triad/triad (piano/bass ostinato.) There is an ostinato figure being played in the left hand of the piano as well, while three note triads sound in the RH.

E: 1st Chorus Sax Solo (Entire Form of Prelude) | Key: Db

F: 2nd Chorus Sax Solo (Shortened Form of Prelude) | Key: Db – Solo Form Shortened to Allow for Assimilation of Transitional Material

G: Transitional Material is equivalent to *Interlude I* from *Original Prelude Form* ~ Melody Re-enters at this Point

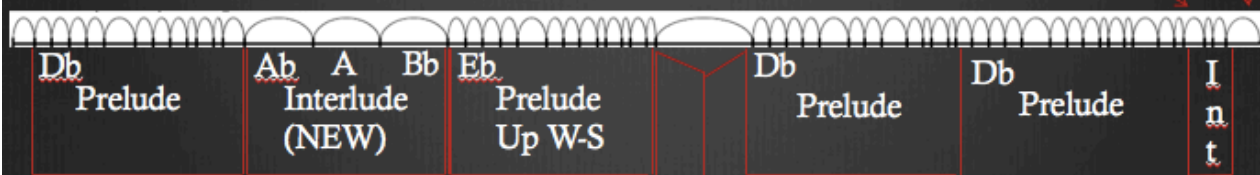
*: Closing – Equivalent to *Closing Material* from *Original Prelude*

HOW IT ALL BREAKS DOWN

Prelude (104 mm)



JSB (471 mm)
(575 w/ rpt)



48 mm: **TRIAD/TRIAD** ~ 4 (Bb/D) | 3 (Db/F) | 4 (G/B) | 3 (C/E) | 3 (Ab/A) | 4 (F#/F) | 3 (B/C) | 3 (Ab/G) | 3 (B/G) | 4 (A/B) | 3 (C#/E) | 3 (C/B) | 4 (C#/B) | 2 (C# w/G# in bass) | 2 (F# w/G# in bass) |

BECOMES PALINDROME AFTER 7 mm. BOTH BACH and ZENON USED PALINDROMES!!!

DR. JONATHAN SARAGA

www.jonathansaraga.com | jonathan@jonathansaraga.com | (347) 574-2003

BIBLIOGRAPHY

codonata. "Glenn Gould talks about JS Bach". YouTube video. Uploaded February 11th, 2012.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crQ8YEukUjg>.

Heri, Joseph. *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism. Choir, Congregation, and Three Centuries of Conflict*. (New York: Oxford University Press).

Smith, Timothy. Cothen (1717-1723). Sojourn. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/tas3/cothen.html> (last updated 1996, accessed April 29th, 2017).

Tomita, Yo. History of Conception and Revision Process: The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1.
<http://www.music.qub.ac.uk/tomita/essay/wtc1.html> (last updated 1996, accessed April 29th, 2017).

Wikipedia contributors. "Johann Sebastian Bach". *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*.
https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Johann_Sebastian_Bach&oldid=776880617(accessed April 30, 2017).