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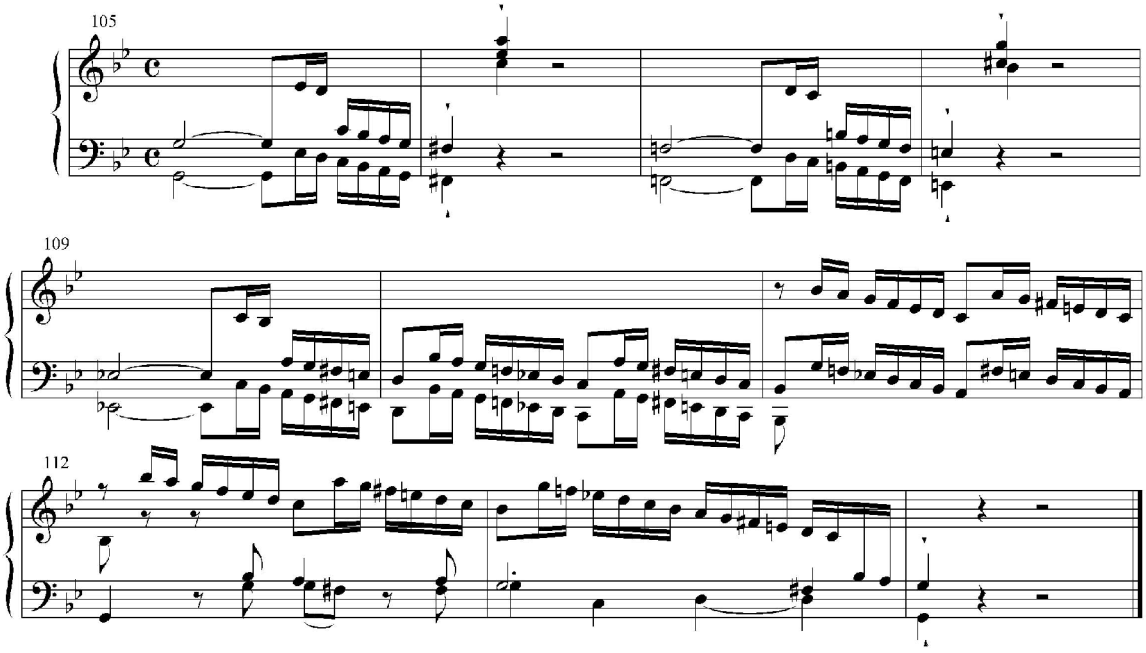
The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 7.6. Bach's keyboard fugues

The one fugue that Bach included in his Keyboard Pieces of Various Types is the lively and relatively unlearned W. 119/5 in G minor, ostensibly in three voices but largely in two. Even this piece is probably too long and homogeneous in style and texture for its own good, employing a scale motive from its subject in practically every measure. It nevertheless reveals that, beyond being able to write the type of school counterpoint demonstrated in the triple fugue in E-flat, Bach could also compose polyphony that is truly idiomatic for a keyboard instrument. To compose in two or three rhythmically and melodically distinct parts playable at the keyboard requires considerable skill. Bach had gained some experience in this matter by composing the less consistently successful W. 119/3 and 4, previously published fugues of similar type. Like a number of Sebastian's keyboard fugues—especially the more *galant* ones in three parts—these are less notable for their contrapuntal work than for their free development of motives from the subject.

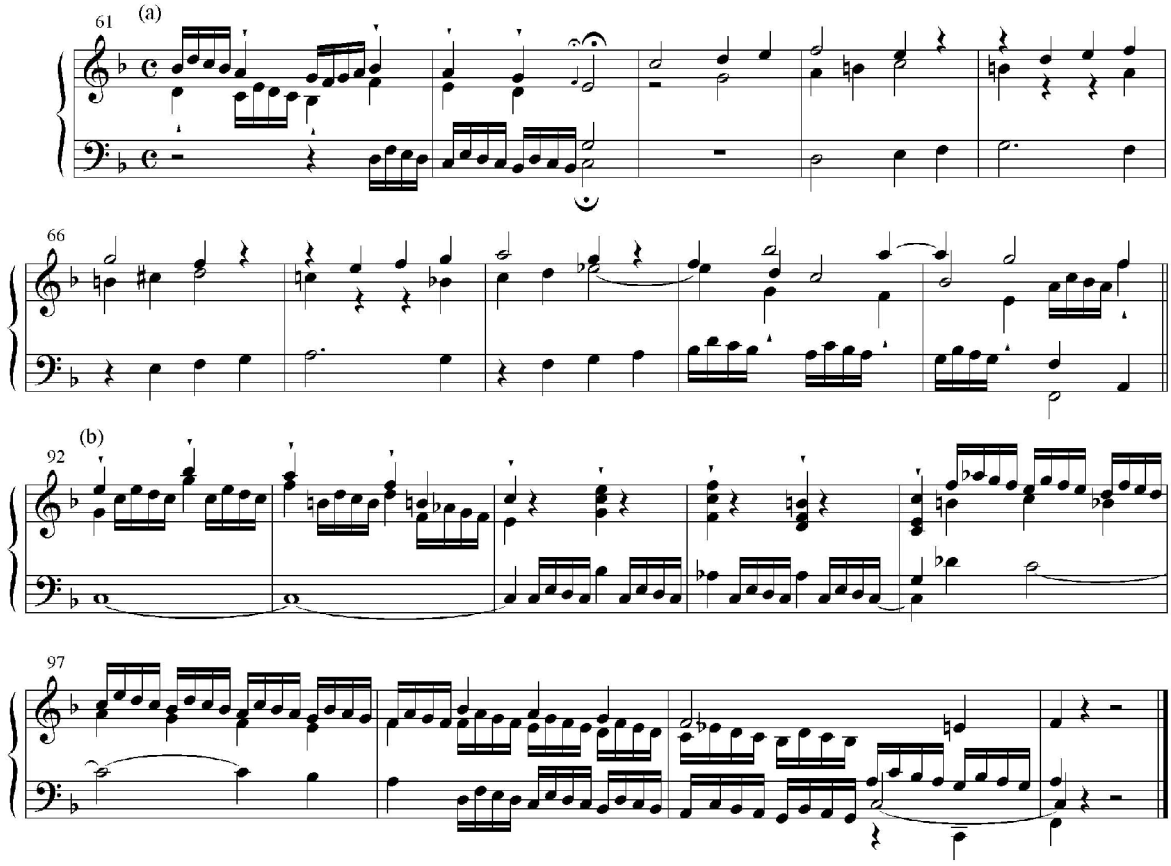
In the G-Minor Fugue, two symmetrically placed strettos (at mm. 30 and 70) constitute a gesture toward the type of organization based on the introduction of various contrapuntal devices that marks many but hardly all of Sebastian's fugues. A third stretto, on the other hand, functions almost like a sonata-style return, as the re-entry of the subject in the tonic at this point follows a distinct articulation that marks off the final section of the piece (m. 97). Likewise more sonata-like than fugal is the apotheosis achieved by the scale motive in a free coda, which concludes the piece by extending the scale extended through two octaves (online example 7.23).[1] Sonata style is even clearer in the F-Major Fugue (W. 119/3), where a fermata on the dominant (m. 62) sets up a stretto, again marking the beginning of the final section. Here too the closing passage uses a motive from the subject (now a turn) to descend through two octaves in a driving sequence (online example 7.24). This is fun to hear or play, but it represents a retreat from purely fugal writing. The stark contrast with the self-consciously learned counterpoint that precedes it leaves the piece as a whole less coherent than those Viennese Classical sonata and quartet movements that organically integrate fugue with sonata style.

[1] Sebastian too used the scale as a climactic gesture in certain fugues (see my "Fugues, Form, and Fingering"), as did Beethoven the fugue of the "Hammerklavier" Sonata. The latter treats the scale motive in a way that might have been suggested by Emanuel's fugue, which Beethoven could have known from its publication in W. 112.

Example 7.23. Fugue in G Minor, W. 119/5, mm. 105–14

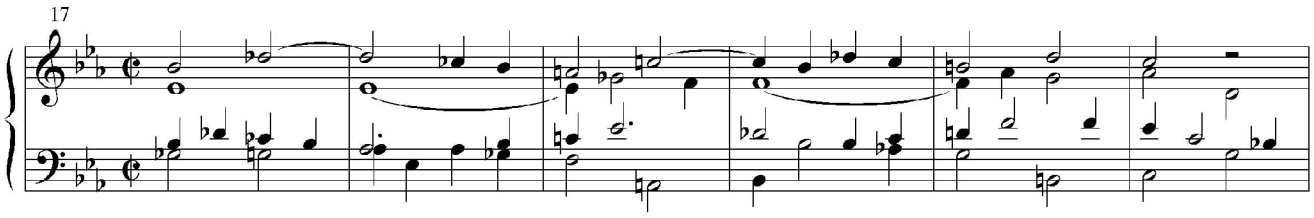


Example 7.24. Fugue in F, W. 119/3, (a) mm. 61–70, (b) mm. 92–100



The triple fugue in E-flat is an example of what has been called “demonstration counterpoint,” its whose successive sections employing successive contrapuntal devices, as Marpurg explained.[2] Yet its unrelieved *stile antico* and the similarity of the second to the third subject give it little variety. Despite Bach's effort to build to a climax toward the end of each section—especially through chromatic modulations reminiscent of his father's music—there are also clumsy passages, as already in the repeated tones and inconsequential inner voices at the end of the first exposition (online example ex. 7.25). The piece superficially recalls the *Art of Fugue,* which Emanuel had recently seen through the press, and he was not ashamed to have Marpurg publish it as an exemplary demonstration of counterpoint. But if he imagined it truly comparable to anything by Sebastian, he was sadly mistaken.

Example 7.25. Fugue in E-flat, W. 119/6, mm. 17–22



[2] “Demonstration counterpoint” is Peter Williams's term for works such as the *Art of Fugue;* see his *Organ Music of J. S. Bach,* 3:191. Marpurg analyzed it alongside his edition in his *Clavierstücke* of 1762–63.