

# Analysis of Bach's Prelude BWV 1007

## 1. Introduction

The question if I understand a composition is for me the same question as 'Can I recompose the composition'. This text is more or less a result of a method of simulated composition. Simulated composition is a very useful analytical tool, for it uncovers principles of the creative process that really matter; principles which get lost in a purely disintegrated analysis (as the ineffective, however popular roman numeral analysis).

What I want is insight in Bach's structural principles, in the 'forma formans', in the self-forming form. One option is to focus on melody instead of harmony. So my question is: can I determine a structural melody that determines form? A melody of main tones that one can use to compose a new piece, in this case Bach's Prelude of BWV 1007? Yes, it's possible although a discussion on how to select main tones can not be avoided.

However, before we start to discuss, consider the following:

- remember that Bach's contemporary, the music theoretician Mattheson considered melody as more important than harmony
- many of Bach's melodies can be seen as diminutions of chorale melodies; the prelude below has connections with e.g. 'Das walt mein Gott' from Musicalisches Gesangbuch (1736) with Bach as supervisor
- that basso continuo players know how to harmonize and elaborate melodic formulas (e.g. the discant and tenor clausula)

## 2. First question: determining main tones

Study the following early version of Bach's BWV 846 and determine the main tones of the upper voice. Probably, you say: E-F-F-E-D-D, i.e. an embellished form of E-D



Study the following, latest version of Bach's BWV 846 and determine the main tones of the upper voice. Probably, you say: E-F-F-E-A-D-G

However, in fact your E-F-F-E-A-D-G can also be seen as an embellished E-D: the high tones A and G are simply ornaments of the tones E and D. I'll analyze Bach's Prelude in this way: looking at tones that reduce the reality into an easy to grasp melodic structure.

### 3. Second question: what is an easy to grasp melodic structure?

Analyzing the 18th century basso continuo methods, we can at least discern two basic structures:

- melodic cadence (as the clausula for discant and tenor)
- line (tirata), often descending

With these structures, anyone can compose a melody as a combination of line and clausula. Some examples, that show some expansion techniques.

#### 4. Third question: what is Bach's hidden melody?

Bach's Prelude for cello (BWV 1007) consists of two sections 1 (bar 1–22) and 2 (bar 22–end), that use nearly identical melodic structures, that provides us two variants of some sort of a hidden melody in a descending, stepwise movement.

Only the way they are embellished and expanded, differ! Essential in Bach's diminutions is the use of register change to create pitch variety, that in turn leads to melodic freedom!

Study the expansion techniques of both sections as shown below.

#### 5. Fourth question: what harmonies does Bach use?

Because harmony is not the subject of this text, I give now only a few remarks:

- the succession of harmonies has to be understood from lines
- voice leading is the most important factor in understanding the succession of harmonies
- the triad (= a tone and a fifth and a third) is point of departure for 'harmonizing' the 'hidden' melody and
- to make harmony more colourful, other interval combinations can be used. Examples: a tone and a sixth and a third; or a tone with a fifth, a sixth and a third; or adding a seventh to the triad results in a seventh chord (popular are the dominant and the diminished seventh).

Sometimes, one of the niceties of baroque harmony, harmonies are resolved improperly by applying the so called ellipsis: the omission of an expected resolution. This incorrect use is called catachresis, comparable with a saying like 'Can't you hear that? Are you blind?'

Study the following score carefully.

Implicit melody of main tones

2

Implicit 'chords' – note voice exchange

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11 12

Musical notation for measures 11 and 12. Measure 11 shows a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). Measure 12 shows a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). The middle staff contains a melodic line in the treble clef with eighth notes and sixteenth notes.

13 14

Musical notation for measures 13 and 14. Measure 13 shows a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). Measure 14 shows a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). The middle staff contains a melodic line in the treble clef with eighth notes and sixteenth notes.

15 16

Musical notation for measures 15 and 16. Measure 15 shows a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). Measure 16 shows a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). The middle staff contains a melodic line in the treble clef with eighth notes and sixteenth notes.

17 18

Musical notation for measures 17 and 18. Measure 17 shows a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). Measure 18 shows a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). The middle staff contains a melodic line in the treble clef with eighth notes and sixteenth notes.

19 20

Musical notation for measures 19 and 20. Measure 19 shows a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). Measure 20 shows a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). The middle staff contains a melodic line in the treble clef with eighth notes and sixteenth notes.

The image displays the first system of a musical score for the first part of Bach's Prelude BWV 1007. The system consists of five systems of staves, each containing two staves (treble and bass clef). The music is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The first system covers measures 21 through 30. Measure 21 starts with a whole note G in the bass clef and a half note G in the treble clef. The right hand plays a series of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The left hand plays a series of eighth notes: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. Measure 22 continues the eighth-note pattern in the right hand: A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4. The left hand continues: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. Measure 23: Right hand: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Left hand: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. Measure 24: Right hand: A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4. Left hand: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. Measure 25: Right hand: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Left hand: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. Measure 26: Right hand: A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4. Left hand: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. Measure 27: Right hand: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Left hand: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. Measure 28: Right hand: A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4. Left hand: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. Measure 29: Right hand: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Left hand: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. Measure 30: Right hand: A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4. Left hand: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. Red dots are placed above the first measure of measures 22 and 29.

31 32

33 34

35 36

37 38

39 40

The first system of the musical score covers measures 41 and 42. It is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The score consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, a bass clef staff in the middle, and a bass clef staff at the bottom. Measure 41 begins with a red dot above the treble staff. Measure 42 begins with a red circle above the treble staff. The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes in the middle staff, with a steady bass line in the bottom staff.

The second system of the musical score covers measures 43 and 44. It continues in G major and 3/4 time. Measure 43 begins with a red circle above the treble staff. Measure 44 begins with a red circle above the treble staff. The musical notation follows the same pattern as the first system, with a rhythmic melody in the middle staff and a supporting bass line in the bottom staff.

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**About the author:**

Reinier Maliepaard is psychologist, software engineer, organist and teacher at the ArtEZ Conservatorium Netherlands (music theory and music history). He maintains [www.bestmusicteacher.com](http://www.bestmusicteacher.com), a website for music students, musicians and all other musiclovers with

- efficient and effective digital training tools
- background information on music history, music theory and composing

This article has been typeset with his freeware/open source (GPL2 and above) music notation program MC Musiceditor 8.0.2 ([www.mcmusiceditor.com](http://www.mcmusiceditor.com)).

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