

# Fugue no. 10 (em)

*The Well-Tempered Clavier Book I*, J. S. Bach



## History

Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, which was assembled in 1722 while Bach was employed in Cöthen, contains 24 pairs of preludes and fugues in ascending chromatic order, one pair in each of the 12 major, and 12 minor, keys. While most of the work was newly composed, some of the preludes and fugues were recycled from earlier compositions. Twenty-two years later, while in Leipzig, Bach would compose another set in the same plan. The latter cycle is known as Book II of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. The two books are often called “The 48,” in reference to their sum of 48 preludes plus 48 fugues (grand total of 96 compositions).

## Structure

The em fugue of Book I is the only fugue for two voices in either volume, and the only one of the 48 that is both a *fugue and canon*. Twenty-five years later, Bach would use the same plan for the *Fuga canonica in Epi diapente*, the only one of the ten canons of the *Musical Offering* that is both a canon and fugue.

The above score represents the first 19 measures, roughly half of the em fugue. This, being the essential counterpoint of the work, shall be called “the fugue.” What remains (mm. 20-38) is double counterpoint of “the fugue” at the octave. We’ll call this “the counterfugue.” The fugue plus the counterfugue then comprise fugue no. 10 of Book I.

## Three-Dimensional Model

For our model, the clefs and signature have been omitted. This is because the clefs will change as the fugue becomes the counterfugue. While the actual pitches will also be transposed, the rhythm, contour, and underlying counterpoint of ① and ② will remain unchanged from fugue to counterfugue. We’ll use the Möbius strip to illustrate how double counterpoint transforms “the fugue” into “the counterfugue.”

Here’s how to make your Möbius strip: (1) Cut out the staves along their solid lines, then tape them together in one long strip, (2) Fold along the dotted line so that the music is visible on both sides, (3) Wrap the strip, giving it a half twist, then tape the ends together.

To “play” your model, grip the strip with your index finger and thumb near the points indicated ① and ② respectively. Let your index finger be the high voice, and your thumb the low (as in “the fugue”). Think of your thumb and finger as the playhead. With your other hand, pull “the fugue” through the playhead, taking care not to loosen the playhead more than necessary to allow the fugue to slide between. In your first traverse the high voice (index finger) will play ①, with your low voice (thumb) playing ②. On the second time around, however, your thumb and forefinger will have magically exchanged melodies, each voice singing what the other had sung before.

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