

## FUGUE

A fugue (translated as “flight”, coming from *fuga*, *to put into flight*) is a highly structured and complex composition in which a theme or subject is introduced by one voice and then imitated in other voices in succession (usually three or four voices/parts in total).

The imitating voices are transposed at various intervals (such as the 5<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or octave) and also often modify the imitation slightly, meaning that the imitation is not necessarily strict. Throughout the fugue the subject will reappear across the various voices (referred to as a *statement*), although it may be modified in terms of its melodic intervals or appear in only fragmentary portions. Reappearances of the subject will be interspersed with what are called *episodes*.

A fugue has three main sections:

- **Exposition:** the opening section where the subject is presented continuously and consecutively in all voices, as in one after the other
- **Episodes:** wherever a subject is not presented as a whole, such as in a fractional amount, or no hint of it at all (interspersed with *statements*)—varies in length
- **Statements:** a complete presentation of a subject in one or more voices (interspersed with *episodes*)—varies in length depending on how many voices present the subject

Other important terms:

- Subject: the main theme that informs the fugue; usually around 2 to 4 measures long
- Countersubject (counterpoint): the line written against the initial imitation of the subject
- Augmentation: when the subject is modified so that its note values are longer
- Diminution: when the subject is modified so that its note values are shorter
- Retrograde: when the subject is presented backwards
- Inversion: when the subject is inverted (what went up goes down; what went down goes up)
- Transposition: when the subject is transposed (literally or not)
- Stretto: when subjects overlap in their appearances (instead of appearing consecutively)
- Real answer: strict/literal imitation of the subject, usually a 5<sup>th</sup> higher (or 4<sup>th</sup> lower)
- Tonal answer: modified imitation of subject

A timeline for a fugue might look like this:

Exposition---Episode<sup>1</sup>---Statement<sup>1</sup>---Ep.<sup>2</sup>---St.<sup>2</sup>---Ep.<sup>3</sup>---St.<sup>3</sup>---Ep.<sup>4</sup>---etc.---St.<sup>x</sup> (in stretto)---End

A timeline for an Exposition (opening section) might look like this:

Voice<sup>1</sup>: Subject--- Countersubject-----  
Voice<sup>2</sup>:                   Subject ↑P5-----  
Voice<sup>3</sup>:                   Subject ↓P8-----  
Voice<sup>4</sup>:                   Subject ↓P4--- } *Begin 1<sup>st</sup> Episode...*

The fugue was popular in, but not limited to, the Baroque era. Fugues are still used in modern composition.