Rests, articulation, tempo, and rubato in Bach's music

Steve Goss

Tonebase Livestream 22nd March 2022

www.stephengoss.net

Overview

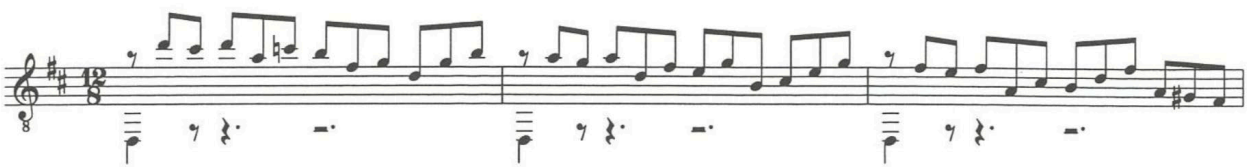
- Part 1 – Implicit and Explicit harmonies and textures
    - Why did Bach take such trouble in notating his durations?
- Part 2 – Three Preludes
    - C Major Prelude BWV 846
    - G Major Prelude BWV 1007
    - D Major Prelude BWV 998

Part 1 – implicit and explicit harmonies and textures

Why did Bach take such trouble in notating his durations?

- Short bass notes proliferate in BWV 995, 998, and elsewhere in Bach's music
- Rhythmic subtleties would be lost in lute intabulations
- Lute technique was ill-adapted to the constant damping of bass strings (thumb technique)
- Should guitarists follow Bach's meticulous notation or the perceived performance habits of early 18th Century lutenists?
- Should performance practice reside in the lute or in the notation?

Prelude from BWV 998, opening



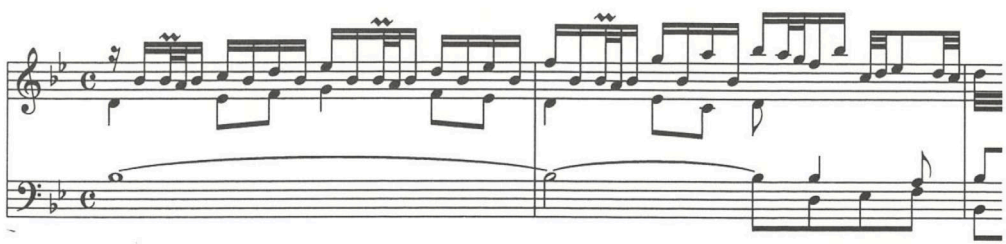
How long is the bass note?

- Manuel Barrueco
- Paul Galbraith
- Gustav Leonhardt
- Sean Shibe
- John Williams

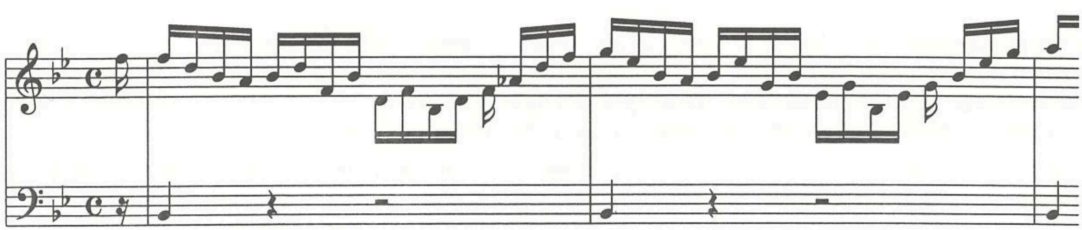
Marking the metre: Bass notes and textures in Bach:

Examples from First Keyboard Partita BWV 825

Praeludium

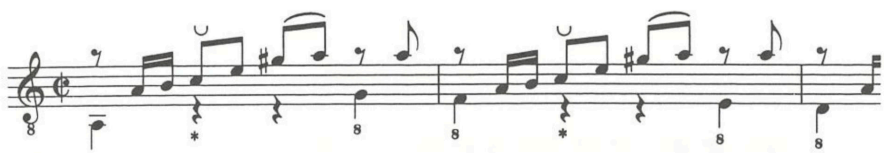


Allemande

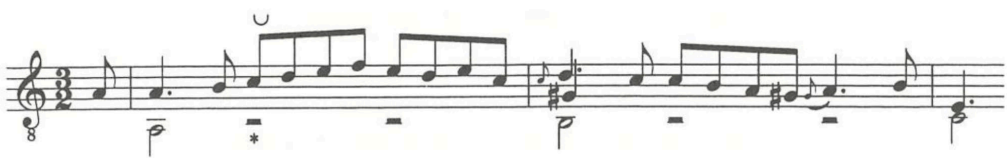


Ends of bass notes as metrical accents

BWV 997
Prelude



BWV 995
Courante

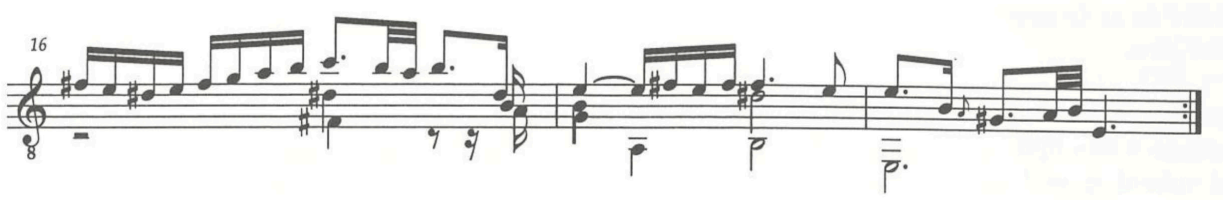


BWV 1006a
Praeludium

Sustained textures as a special effect at cadences

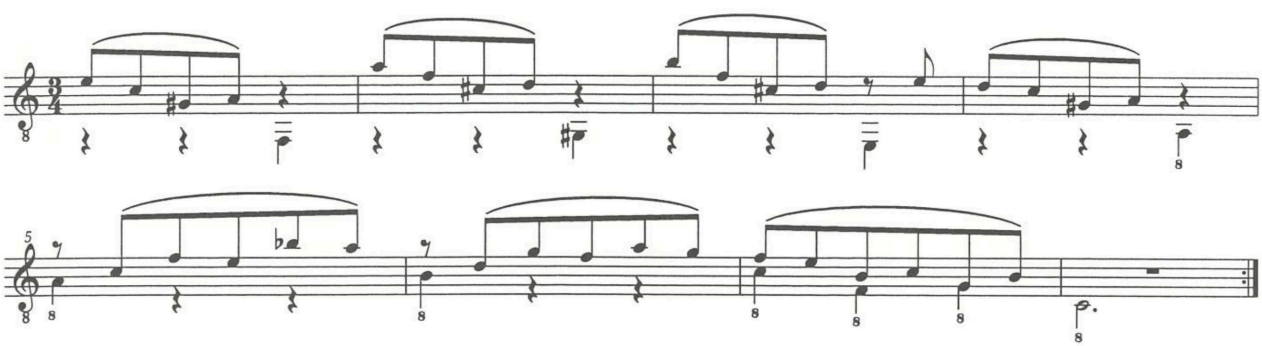
BWV 995
Allemande
Bars 5 to 8

BWV 995
Allemande
Bars 16 to 18



Sustained textures as a special effect at cadences

Sarabande from BWV 995



Part 2 – Three Preludes

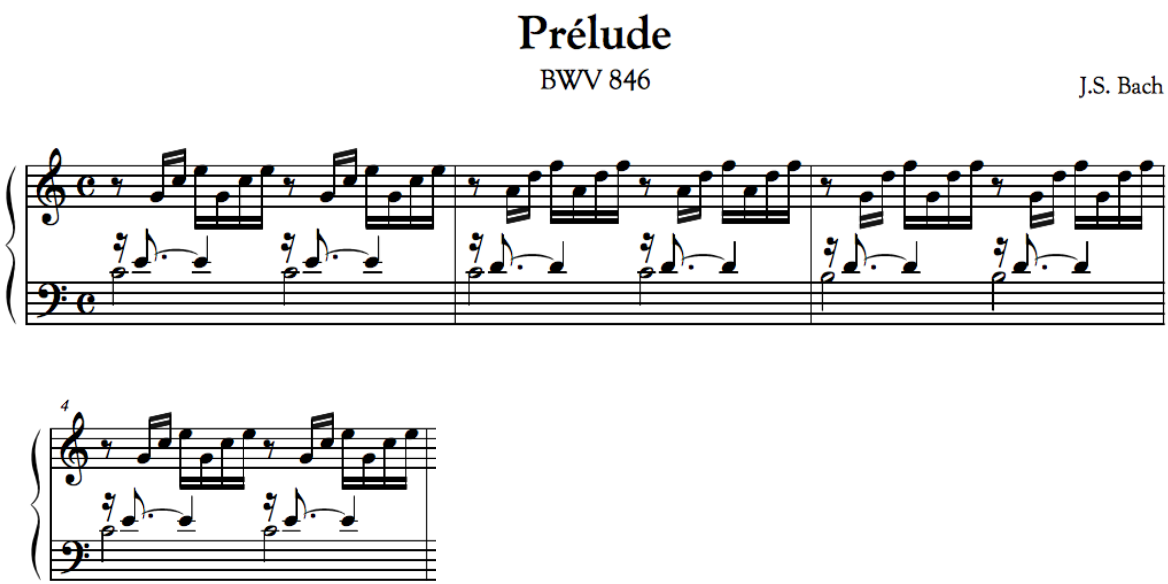
Tempo, rubato, expression, harmony, and structure

- C Major Prelude BWV 846
- G Major Prelude BWV 1007
- D Major Prelude BWV 998

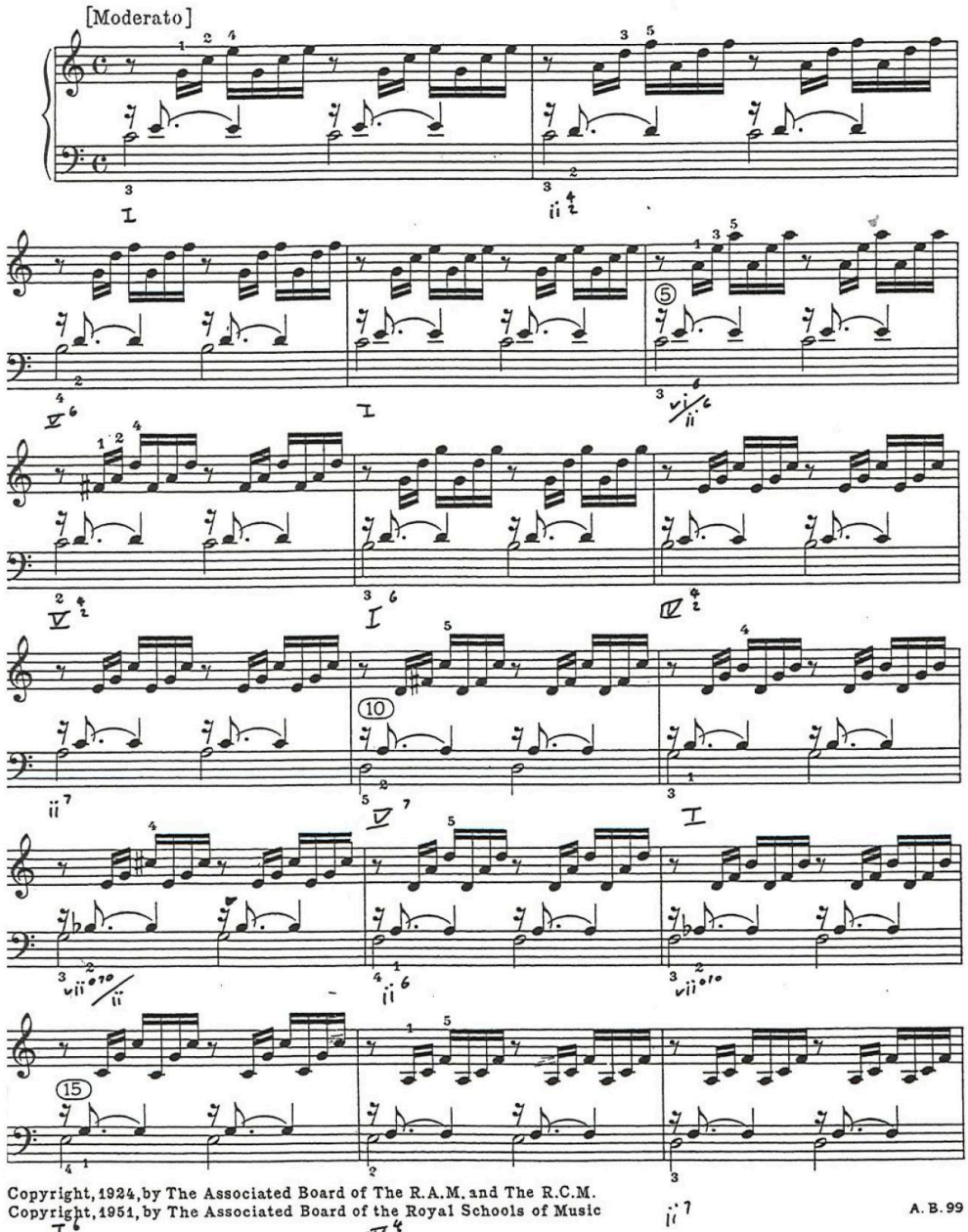
Bach's C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

- Andras Schiff
- Glenn Gould
- Fazil Say
- Enno Voorhorst



PRELUDE I



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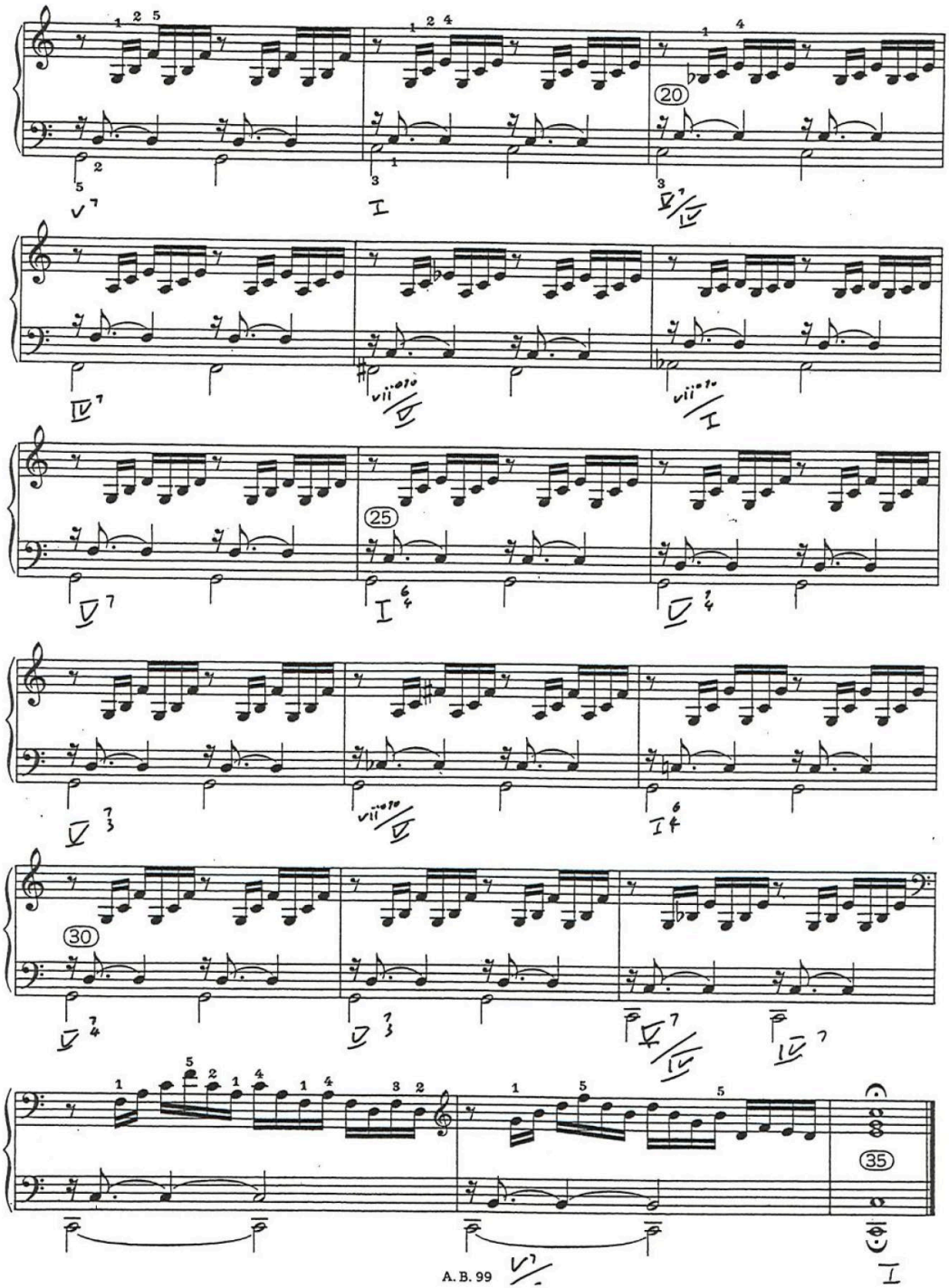
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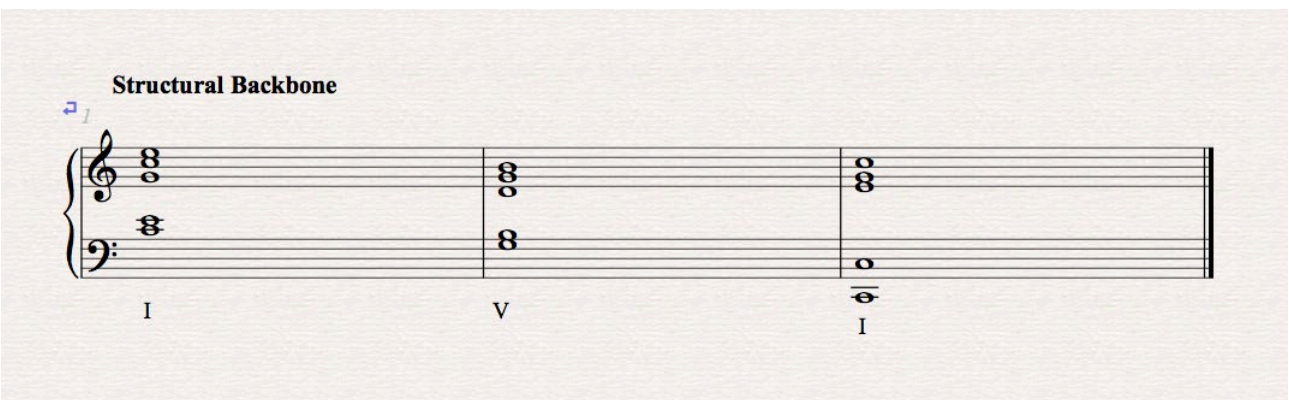
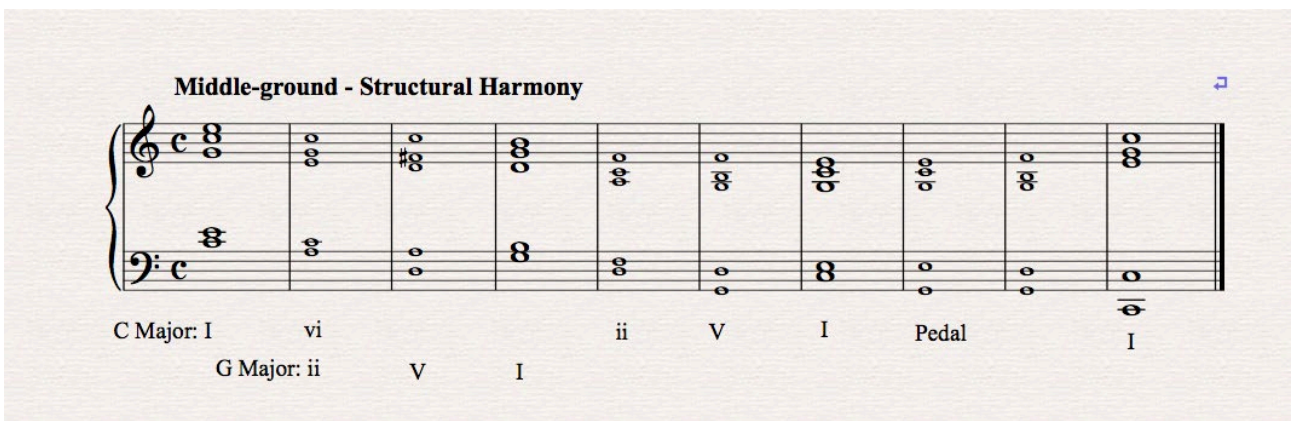
Bach’s C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier



Bach's C Major Prelude, BWV 846

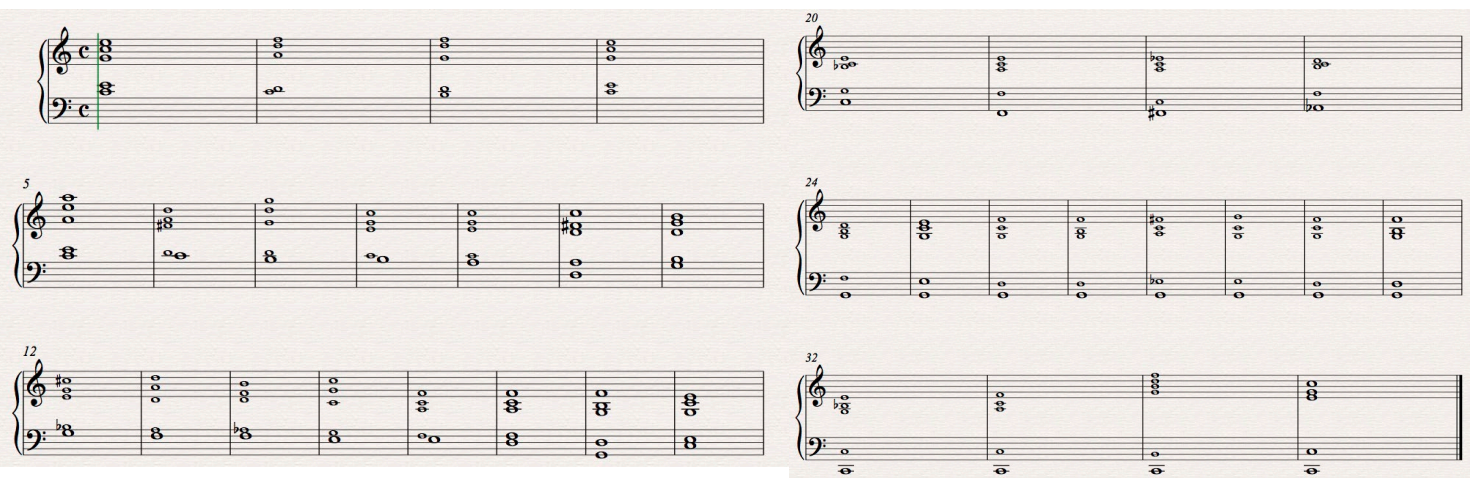
from the Well-Tempered Clavier



Bach’s C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

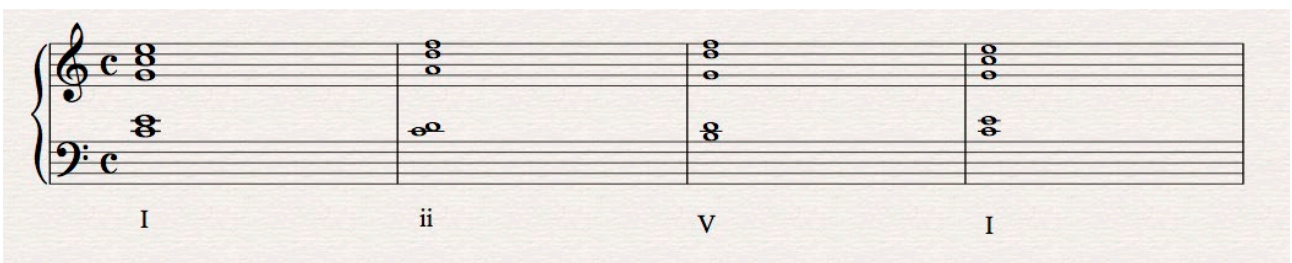
All the chords



Bach’s C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

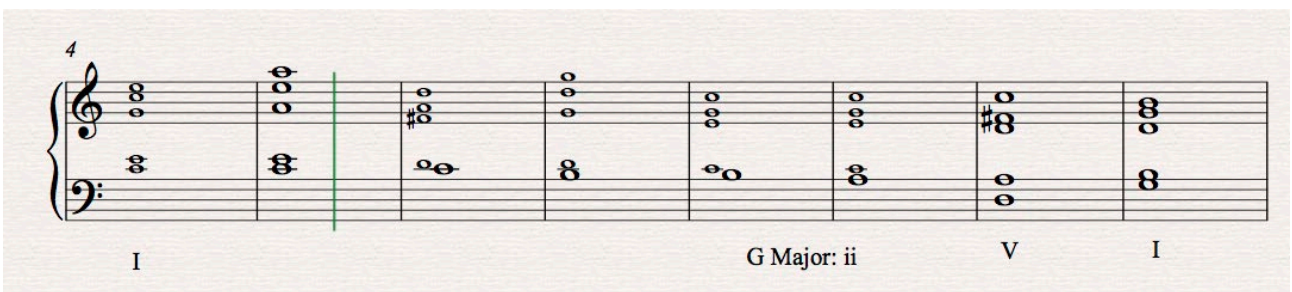
The opening



Bach's C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

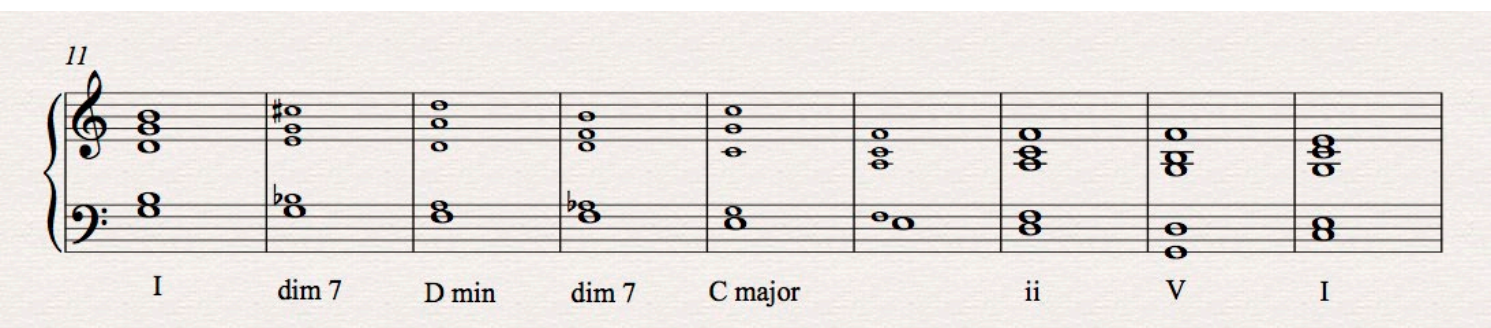
The modulation to G



Bach's C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

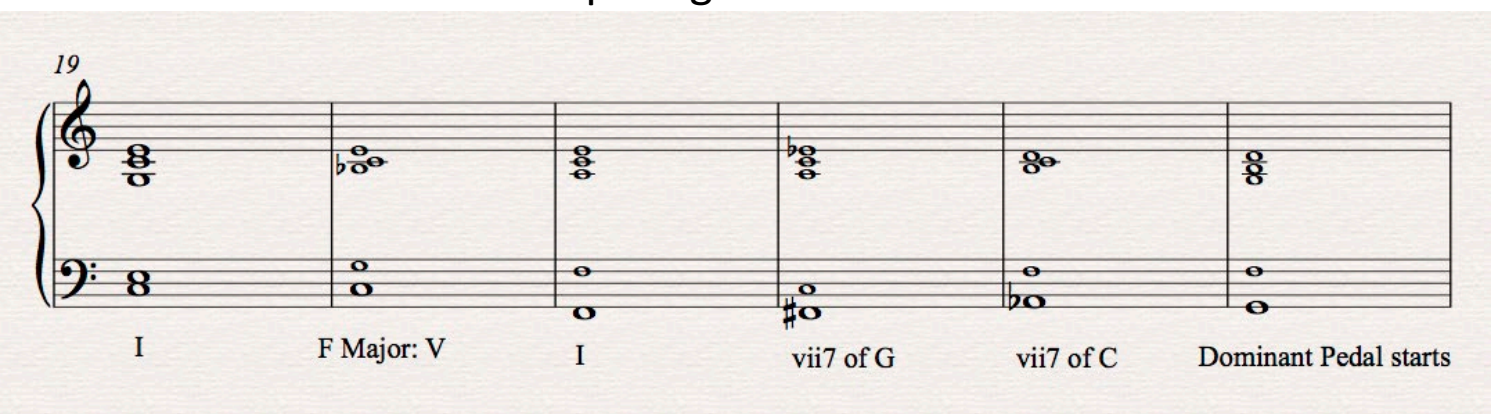
Going back to C



Bach's C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

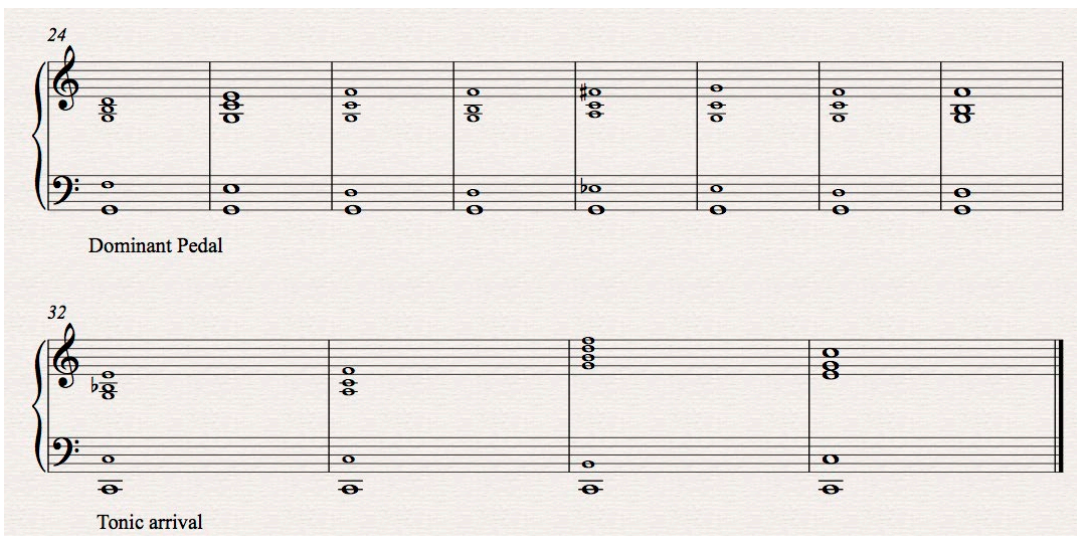
Preparing for the Pedal



Bach's C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

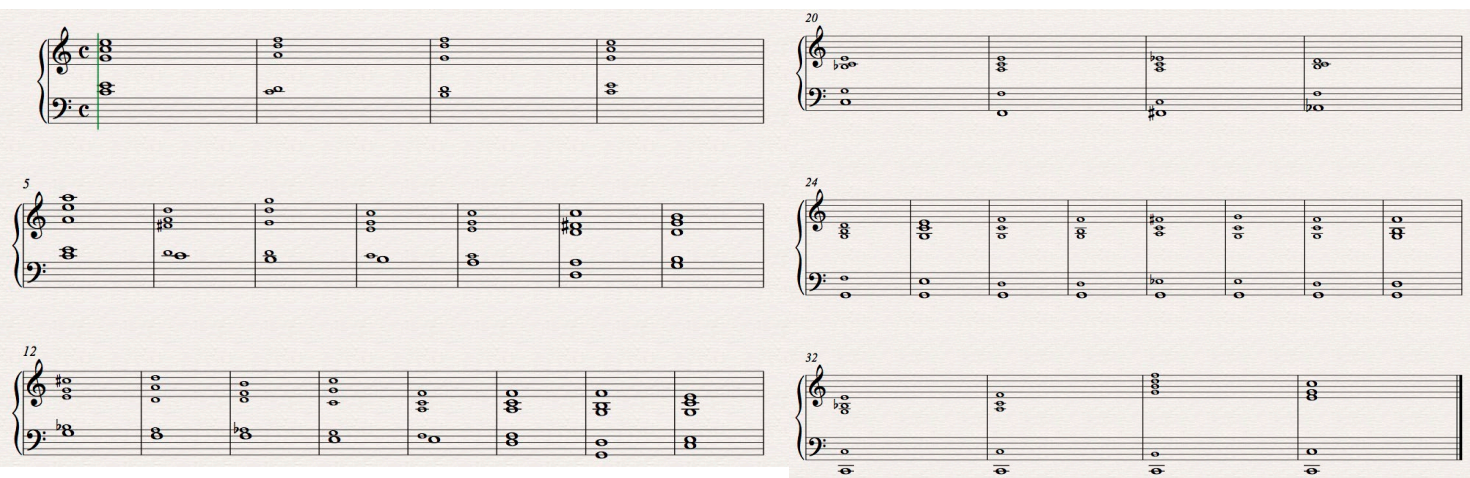
Dominant Pedal and Resolution onto Tonic



Bach’s C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

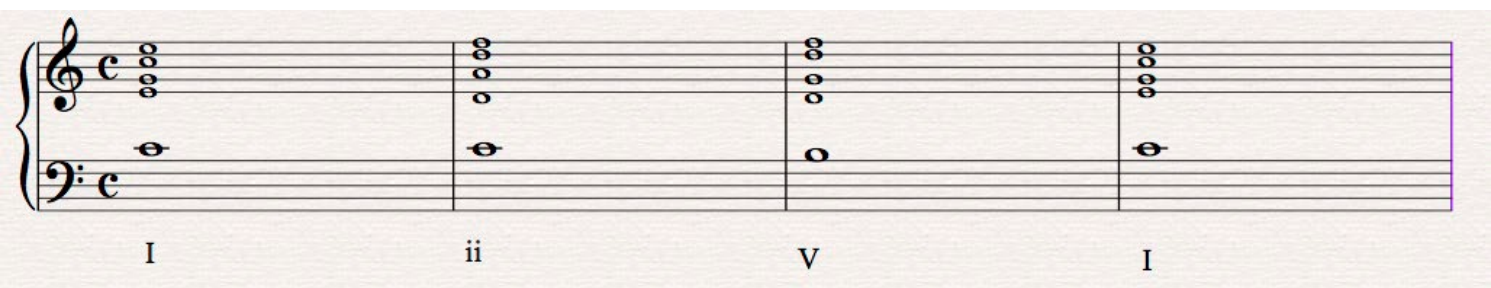
All the chords



Bach's C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

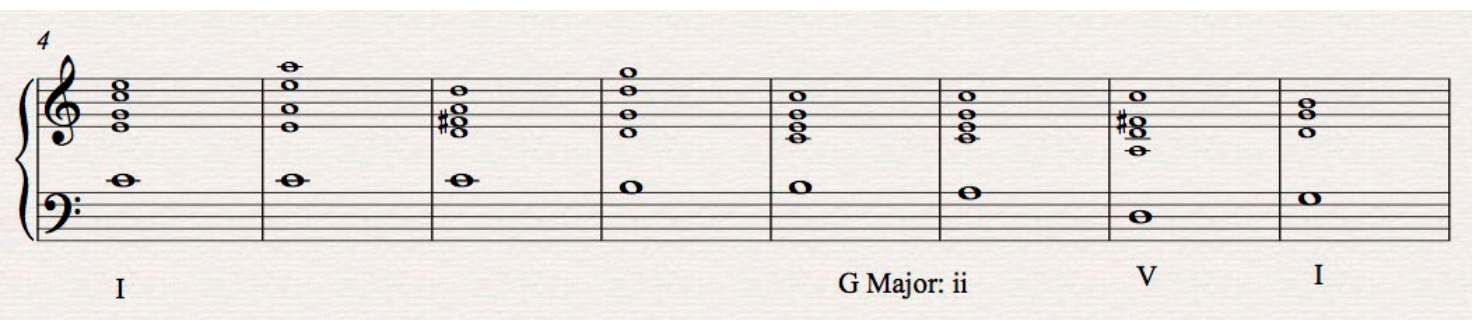
Bass line descent



Bach's C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

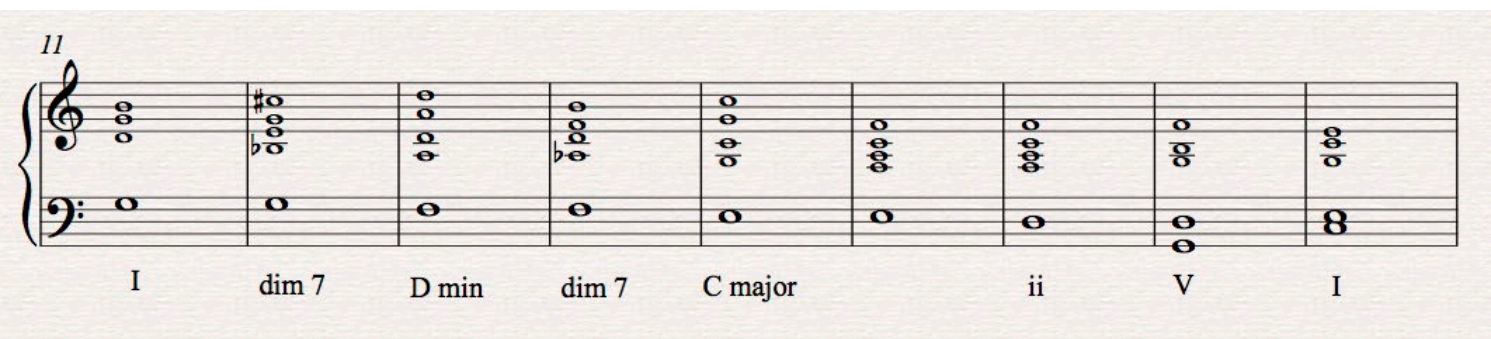
Bass line descent



Bach's C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

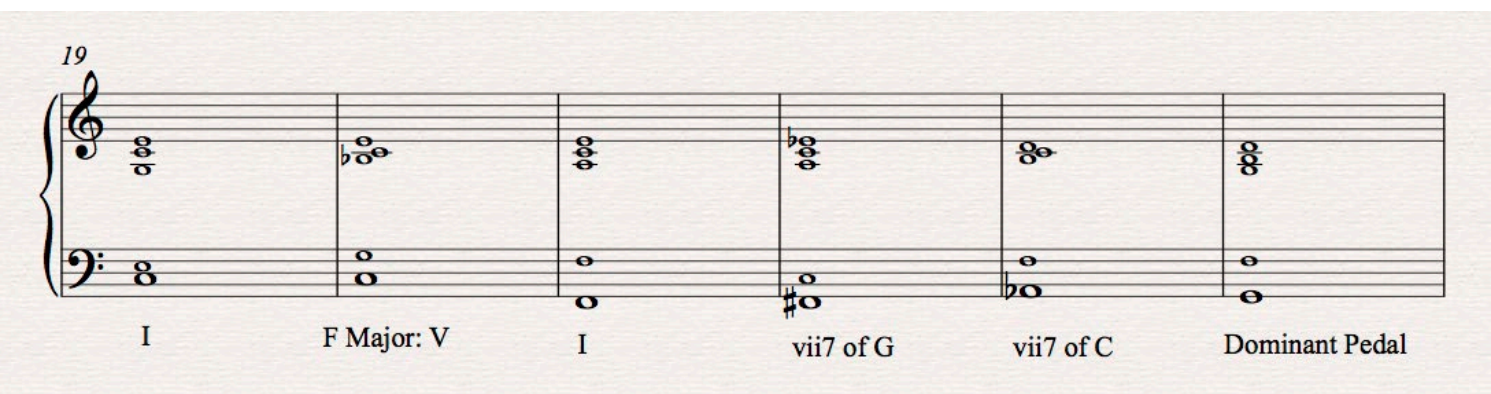
Bass line descent



Bach's C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

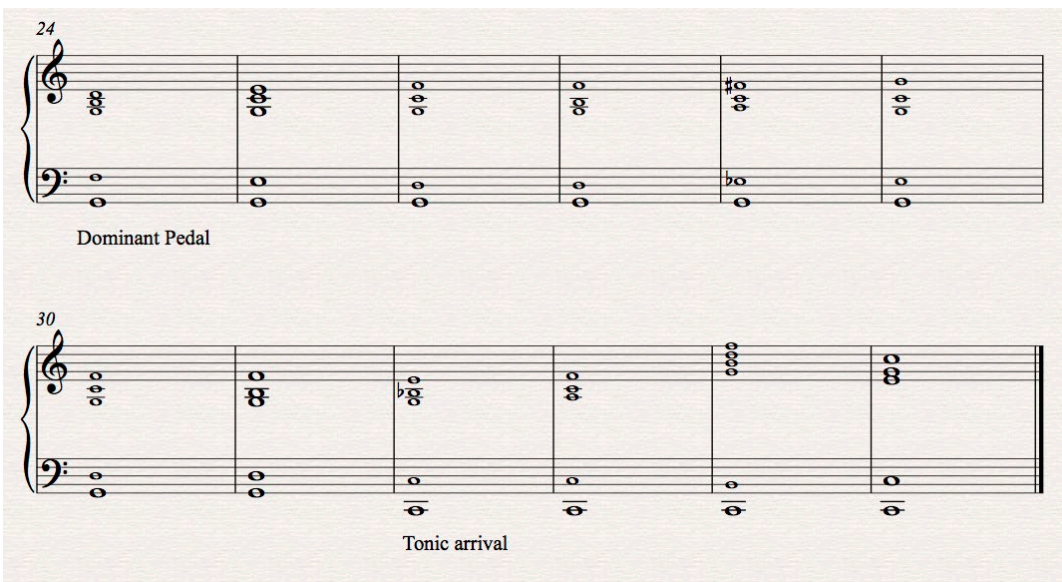
Bass line descent



Bach’s C Major Prelude, BWV 846

from the Well-Tempered Clavier

Bass line descent



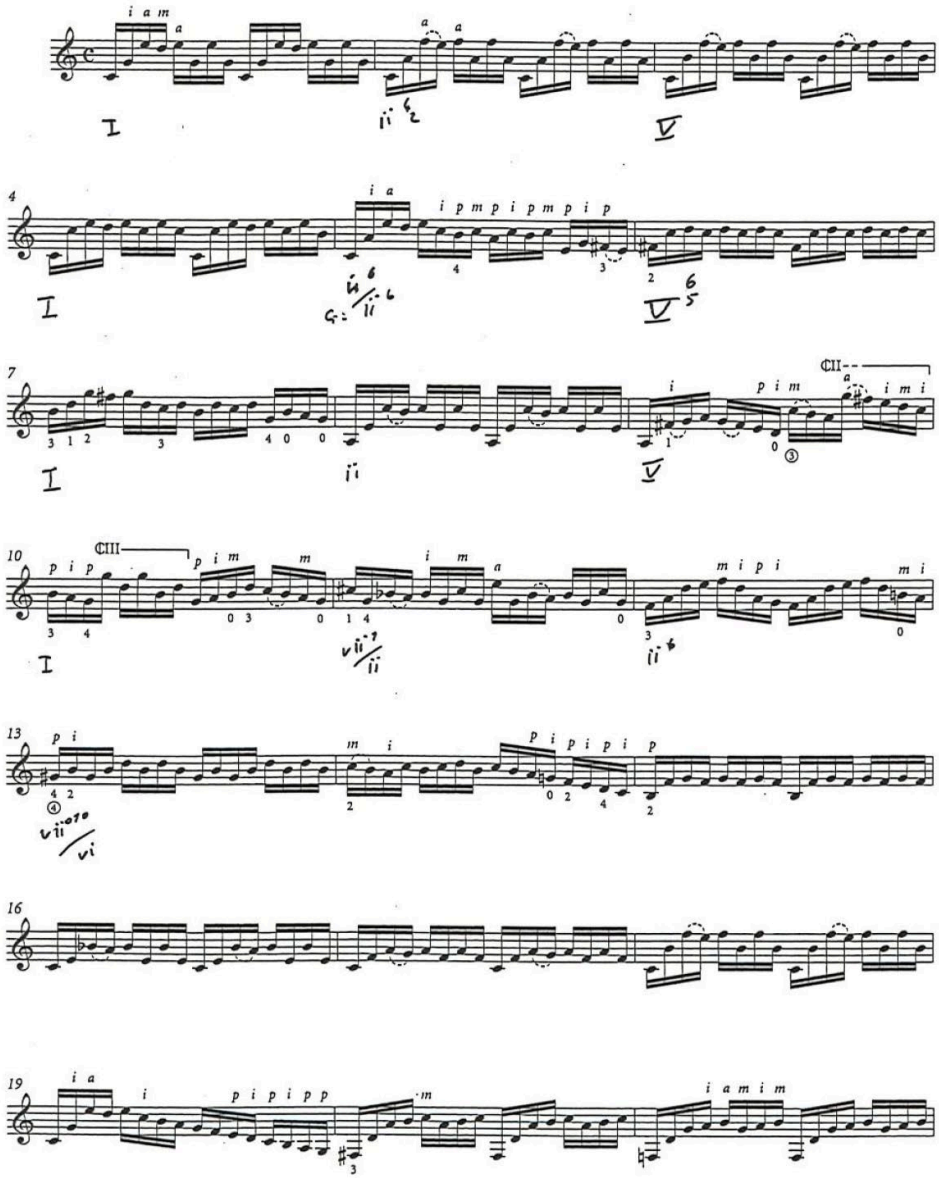
Prelude from Cello Suite No. 1 BWV 1007

- David Watkin
- Yo-yo Ma
- Mischa Maisky

Suite I

BWV 1007

Prelude



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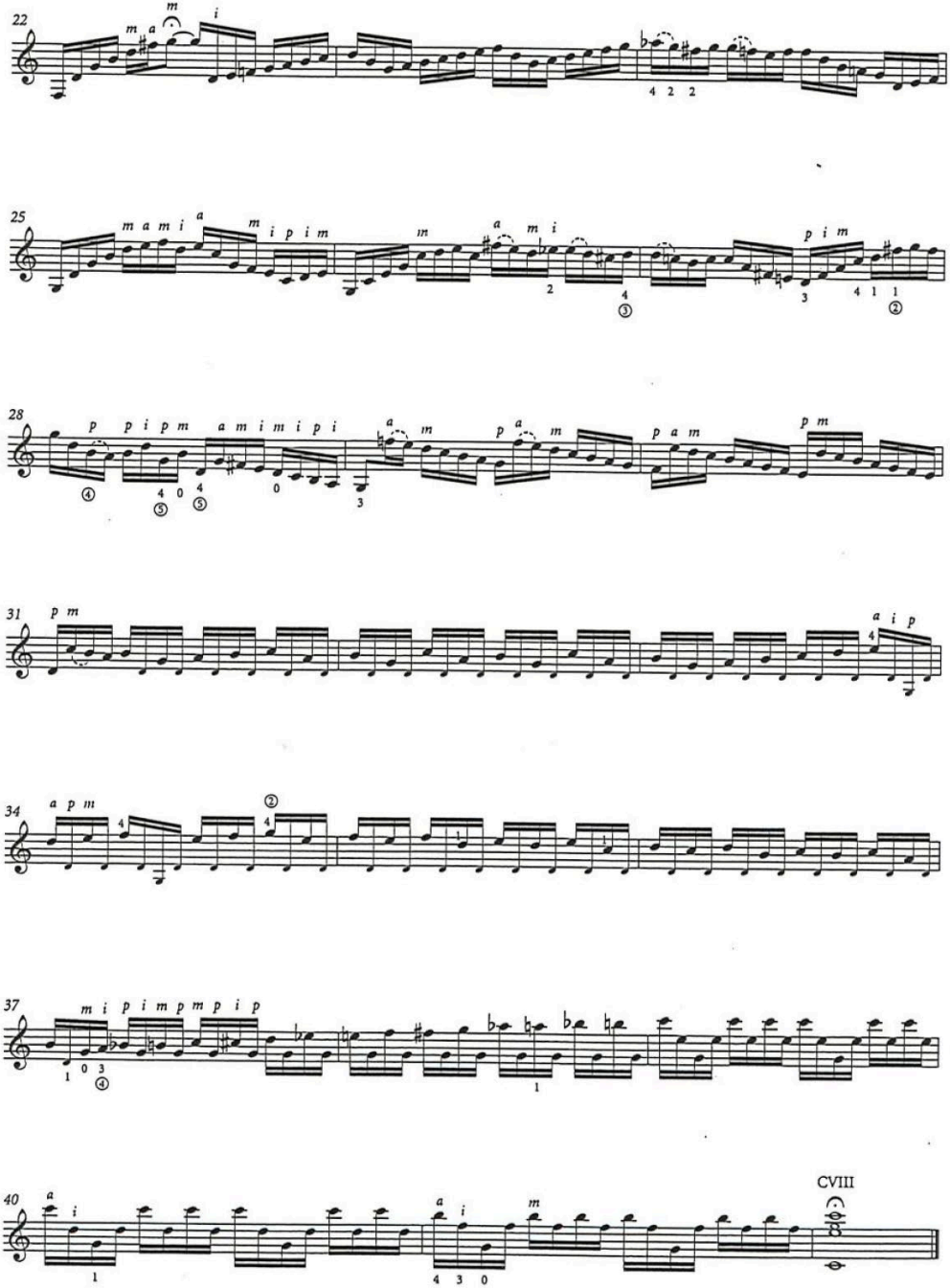

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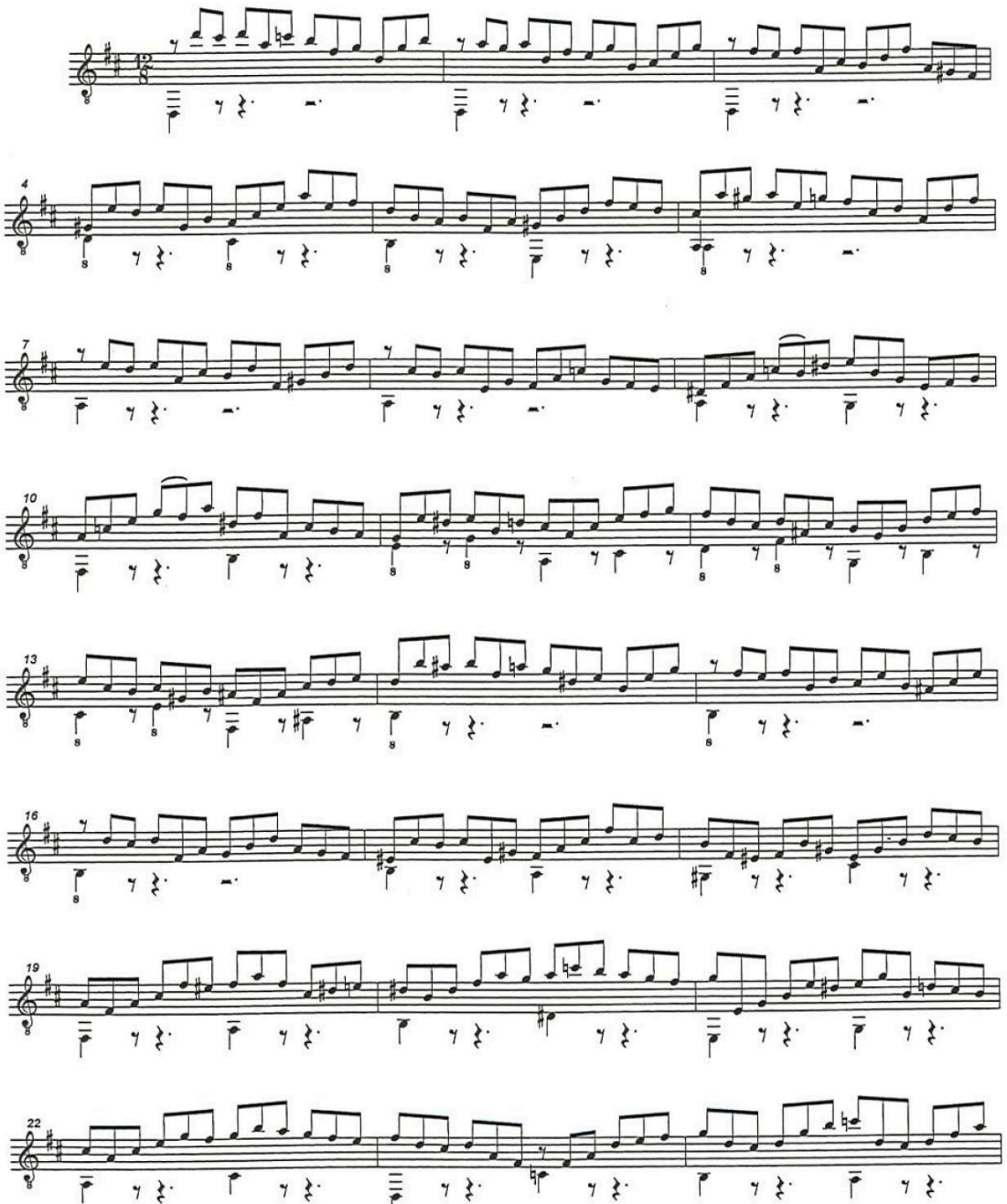
Prelude
from Prelude, Fugue, and Allegro BWV 998

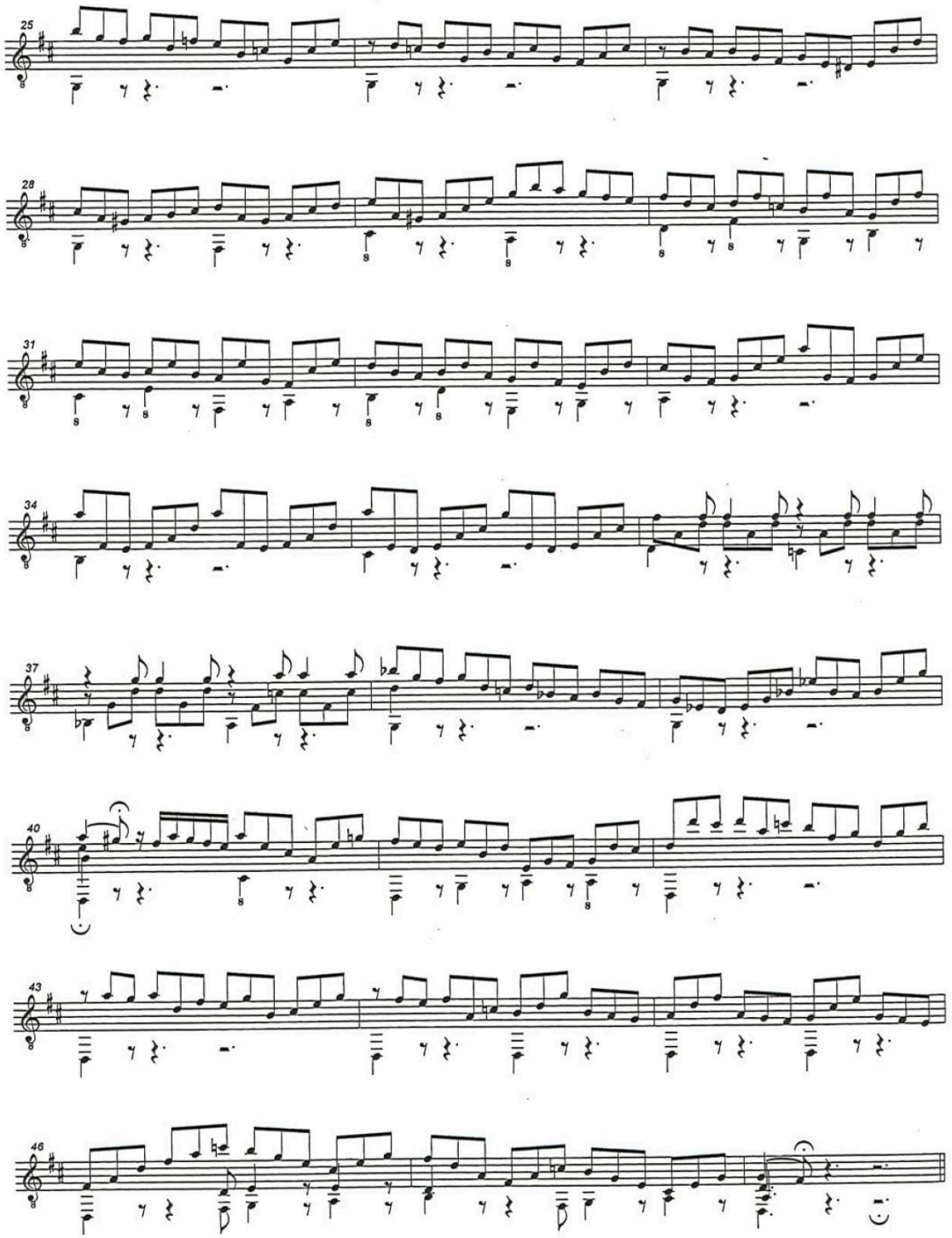
- Manuel Barrueco
- Paul Galbraith
- Gustav Leonhardt
- Sean Shibe
- John Williams

Prelude pour La Luth. ó Cembal. par J. S. Bach

originally in E♭ major

[BWV 998/I (c. 1740)]

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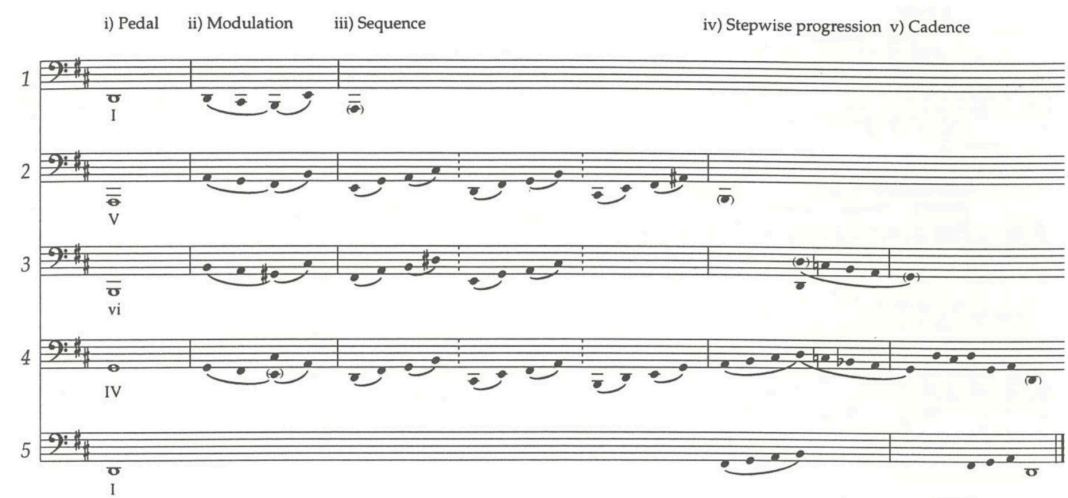
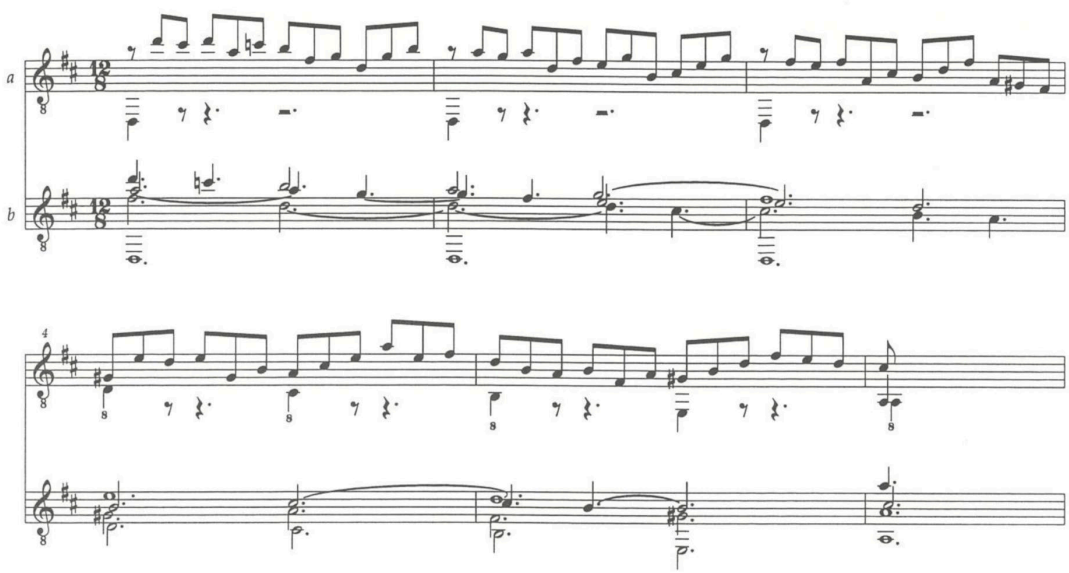
Structural plan of BWV 998, Prelude

Stanza	Measure	Proportions	Harmonic movement
1	1	6 measures	D→A (I→V)
2	6	9 measures	A→Bm (V→vi)
3	14	12 measures	Bm→G (vi→IV)
4	25	18 measures	G→D (IV→I)
5 (Coda)	43	7 measures	D→D (I→I)

Bass plan of BWV 998, Prelude



Questions of sonority



Reading Bach's Notation

'Musical notation is a form of technology, and like all technologies, it evolves rapidly. The conventions and work arounds of even a few decades ago are soon forgotten.

In any musical score, the limitations of the notation are invisible; they are proclaimed nowhere on the page. Even seasoned pianists may not notice that in Beethoven's piano sonatas, there is not a single *mezzo forte* or *mezzo piano.*

Of course, Beethoven's music requires every gradation of dynamic, but the specific notation of *mf* was no more available to Beethoven than an iPhone was to our parents.'

Jonathan Leathwood, GFA lecture 2017

Questions?

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