WHAT THE FUGUE?

An exploration of musical form featuring Bach’s Fugue in G minor

Presented by Alex Pierson and Logan Tolman

Performance by the Caine Brass Quintet
What exactly is a fugue? (fyōōg)

A fugue is a contrapuntal* composition in which a short melody or phrase (the subject) is introduced by one part and successively taken up by others and developed by interweaving the parts.

*Counterpoint: The art or technique of setting, writing, or playing a melody or melodies in conjunction with another, according to fixed rules.

Image credit: Crystal Broderick
Counterpoint

- Music that focuses on individual and independent lines of music that interplay with each other.
- Focuses on musical lines rather than chords or chord progressions.
- Artfully moves from dissonant intervals to consonant intervals between the separate lines.
Subject

• The main theme

• Introduced by the first voice/player

• This is what will repeat and vary slightly throughout the piece
Fugue in G minor

The Subject

JS Bach/arr. Neil Balm
Answer

• A response to the subject based off of the same musical theme

• May or may not use the same intervals as the theme

• Always starts on a different pitch than the subject
Fugue in G minor

The Answer

JS Bach/arr. Neil Balm
Counter Subject

• A secondary theme, like the subject, that gets passed around between voices/parts and is developed throughout the piece

• Usually appears when a voice is beginning an answer
Fugue in G minor

The Counter Subject

JS Bach/arr. Neil Balm
Episode

• Sections of the piece after all the voices/parts have been introduced where no part of the subject is present

• All the voices are interplaying and developing other ideas that have been presented

• Alternates with Entries throughout the rest of the piece
I don’t see the Subject....
• Parts of the piece after all the voices have entered where the Subject or part of the Subject is present in one or more voices

• Doesn’t usually last as long as the Subject does at the beginning when the voices/parts are introduced

• In these sections, the Subject may not be exactly the same as in the beginning
There’s a little bit of the Subject!!!
(highlighted in blue)