

Imitative Dissonance in J. S. Bach's Stretto Fugues

**Matthew Santa,
Texas Tech University
matthew.santa@ttu.edu**

Example 1. Bach's C-Major Fugue, BWV 846.

The image displays a musical score for Bach's C-Major Fugue, BWV 846, in C major and 3/4 time. The score is presented in a grand staff format, with the right hand (treble clef) and left hand (bass clef) parts. The piece begins with a first-measure rest, indicated by 'a 4.' above the first measure. The score is annotated with blue and green lines and text to highlight specific musical features:

- 23 notes:** A blue line spans the first two measures of the right hand, indicating a total of 23 notes.
- 28 notes:** A blue line spans the first two measures of the left hand, indicating a total of 28 notes.
- 94 notes:** A blue line spans the first two measures of the right hand, indicating a total of 94 notes.

Bar numbers are marked at the beginning of the first system (4), the start of the second system (10), and the start of the third system (15). The score continues for several more measures, with various rhythmic patterns and articulations.

Example 1 continued

Subject entries are marked in blue, answers in green

BWV	# of conflicting notes in successive stretto passages	highest-rated stretto location (mm.)	total # of measures	location's relative position
846 (C major)	23, 28, 94, 26, 14, 20	14-19	27	52-70%

Example 2. Bach's D#-Minor Fugue, BWV 853, Exposition.

Example 3. Bach's D#-Minor Fugue, BWV 853, mm. 61-75 (stretto with 75 conflicting notes)

blue line = subject entry; purple line = inverted subject entry

BWV	# of conflicting notes in successive stretto passages	highest-rated stretto location (mm.)	total # of measures	location's relative position
846 (C major)	23, 28, 94 , 26, 14, 20	14-19	27	52-70%
853 (D# minor)	23, 22, 24, 22, 22, 75	61-75	87	70-86%

Example 4. Bach's A-Minor Fugue, BWV 865, opening.

Example 5. Bach's A-Minor Fugue, BWV 865, mm. 64-71.

The image shows a musical score for Example 5, Bach's A-Minor Fugue, BWV 865, measures 64-71. The score is presented in two systems. The first system shows the subject entry in the right hand (blue line) and the inverted subject entry in the left hand (purple line). A blue line above the right-hand staff indicates a total of 118 notes. The second system continues the piece, with a measure number of 70 indicated at the end. A small section of the score is shown below the main system, also with a purple line highlighting the inverted subject entry.

blue line = subject entry; purple line = inverted subject entry

BWV	# of conflicting notes in successive stretto passages	highest-rated stretto location (mm.)	total # of measures	location's relative position
846 (C major)	23, 28, 94 , 26, 14, 20	14-19	27	52-70%
853 (D# minor)	23, 22, 24, 22, 22, 75	61-75	87	70-86%
865 (A minor)	53, 55, 55, 67, 53, 54, 46, 118 , 46, 36, 79	64-71	87	74-82%

Example 6. Bach's E-Major Fugue, BWV 878.

The image shows a musical score for Example 6, Bach's E-Major Fugue, BWV 878. The score is presented in two systems. The first system shows the subject entry in the right hand (green line) and the inverted subject entry in the left hand (green line). A blue line above the right-hand staff indicates a total of 23 notes. The second system continues the piece, with a measure number of 10 indicated at the end. A small section of the score is shown below the main system, also with a green line highlighting the inverted subject entry.

Example 6 continued

System 1: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with a red bracket above it. Bass clef contains a bass line with a green bracket below it. A red bracket above the bass line spans from measure 15 to 27, labeled "27 notes".

System 2: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with a red bracket above it. Bass clef contains a bass line with a green bracket below it. A green bracket above the treble line spans from measure 15 to 19, labeled "5 notes". A red bracket below the bass line spans from measure 15 to 19.

System 3: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with a blue bracket above it. Bass clef contains a bass line with a green bracket below it. A blue bracket above the treble line spans from measure 20 to 24, labeled "5 notes". A red bracket below the bass line spans from measure 20 to 24.

System 4: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with a blue bracket above it. Bass clef contains a bass line with a blue bracket below it. A blue bracket above the treble line spans from measure 25 to 48, labeled "23 notes". A red bracket below the bass line spans from measure 25 to 48.

System 5: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with a blue bracket above it. Bass clef contains a bass line with a blue bracket below it. A blue bracket above the treble line spans from measure 30 to 37, labeled "7 notes". A red bracket below the bass line spans from measure 30 to 37.

System 6: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with a blue bracket above it. Bass clef contains a bass line with a blue bracket below it. A red bracket below the bass line spans from measure 30 to 37, labeled "5 notes". A blue bracket above the treble line spans from measure 30 to 37.

BWV	# of conflicting notes in successive stretto passages	highest-rated stretto location (mm.)	total # of measures	location's relative position
846 (C major)	23, 28, 94 , 26, 14, 20	14-19	27	52-70%
853 (D# minor)	23, 22, 24, 22, 22, 75	61-75	87	70-86%
865 (A minor)	53, 55, 55, 67, 53, 54, 46, 118 , 46, 36, 79	64-71	87	74-82%
878 (E major)	23, 27*, 5, 5, 23(28?) , 5, 7, 19	25-28(-29?)	43	58-65(67?)%

*the stretto with 27 metrical conflicts in mm. 12-15 of BWV 878 is not based on the initial subject

Selected Bibliography

Bakulina, Ellen. 2012. "The Loosening Role of Polyphony: Texture and Formal Functions in Mozart's 'Haydn' Quartets." *Intersections* 32/1-2: 7-42.

Bakulina, Ellen. 2017. "Canons as Hypermetrical Transitions in Mozart." *Music Theory Online* 23/4.

Bruhn, Siglind. 1993. *J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: In-Depth Analysis and Interpretation*. 4 vols. Hong Kong: Mainer International.

Ledbetter, David. 2002. *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: The 48 Preludes and Fugues*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kerman, Joseph. 2005. *The Art of Fugue: Bach Fugues for Keyboard, 1715-1750*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mann, Alfred. 1958. *The Study of Fugue*. London: Faber and Faber.

Maus, Fred Everett. 1988. "Music as Drama." *Music Theory Spectrum* 10: 56-73.

McDonald, Kathryn. 2019. "Exploring Stretto: An Investigation into the Use of Stretto in J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier." MA Thesis, University of Western Ontario.

Mirka, Danuta. 2009. *Metric Manipulations in Haydn and Mozart*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rings, Steven. 2011. *Tonality and Transformation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sobaskie, James William. 2006. "Contextual Drama in Bach." *Music Theory Online* 12/3.