

# A Moonlight Requisition: Mendelssohn Borrowing From Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata

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**Table 1**

J. P. Burkholder's Criteria for Evaluating Claims of Musical Borrowing

Analytical Evidence	Biographical & Historical Evidence	Purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Extent of similarity</li><li>▪ Exactness of match</li><li>▪ Number of shared elements</li><li>▪ Distinctiveness of shared elements</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Knowledge of the source</li><li>▪ Acknowledgement of the source</li><li>▪ Sketches and compositional process</li><li>▪ Typical practice in other pieces</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Structural or thematic functions</li><li>▪ Emulation</li><li>▪ Extramusical associations</li><li>▪ Humor</li></ul>

**Example 1a:** Mendelssohn: Capriccio in E-flat Minor (1823-4), MWV U 43, m. 220-8

This musical score for Mendelssohn's Capriccio in E-flat Minor, measures 220-8, is written for piano in 2/4 time. The key signature is E-flat minor (three flats). The score consists of two systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The melody in the right hand is characterized by triplet eighth notes and accented eighth notes. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with quarter notes and half notes, often featuring triplets. The piece concludes with a final triplet in the right hand.

**Example 1b:** Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 14 in C# Minor (1802), Op. 27, III. *Presto agitato*, m. 9-14

This musical score for Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14 in C# Minor, measures 9-14, is written for piano in 2/4 time. The key signature is C# minor (three sharps). The score consists of two systems, each with a grand staff. The right hand features a rapid, driving melody with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with quarter notes and half notes, often featuring a sustained bass line. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand, marked with a fortissimo (*sf*) dynamic.

## Example 1c: Melodic Comparison\*

Mendelssohn

Beethoven

The image displays two systems of musical notation comparing Mendelssohn's and Beethoven's melodies. Each system consists of two staves: the top staff for Mendelssohn and the bottom staff for Beethoven. The music is in common time (C). The first system shows measures 1 through 4, and the second system shows measures 5 through 8. Annotations include 'S' for strong beats, circles for notes added by Mendelssohn, and rectangular boxes for notes removed by Mendelssohn. A dotted line indicates where Mendelssohn displaces Beethoven's strong beat, and a solid line indicates where Mendelssohn affirms Beethoven's strong beat.

- Rectangular shapes indicate items that Mendelssohn removed from Beethoven's melody, while circles indicate notes that Mendelssohn adds to Beethoven's melody.
- "S"- Strong beat
- Dotted line – Where Mendelssohn displaces Beethoven's strong beat
- Solid line – Several instances where Mendelssohn affirms Beethoven's strong beat

\*The melodies have been transposed to a common key and the rhythmic values of Beethoven's melody have been increased in order to fit along side Mendelssohn's melody.

**Example 2a:** Mendelssohn: Viola Sonata in C Minor (1824), BWV Q 14, III. *Andante con Variazioni*, m. 163-71

**Adagio**

The musical score for Example 2a is in 2/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system shows the right hand playing a series of sixteenth-note patterns, mostly beamed in groups of six, with some eighth-note variations. The left hand provides a simple harmonic accompaniment with sustained notes and chords. The second system continues the right-hand patterns, which become more complex, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. The left hand continues with sustained chords and some moving lines. The tempo is marked 'Adagio'.

**Example 2b:** Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 14 in C# Minor, Op. 27, I. *Adagio sostenuto*, m. 1-11

**Adagio sostenuto**

The musical score for Example 2b is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system shows the right hand playing a series of eighth-note patterns, mostly beamed in groups of three, with some sixteenth-note variations. The left hand provides a simple harmonic accompaniment with sustained notes and chords. The second system continues the right-hand patterns, which become more complex, including triplets and eighth-note runs. The left hand continues with sustained chords and some moving lines. The tempo is marked 'Adagio sostenuto'.

## Example 2c: Harmonic Comparison

Mendelssohn

m. 163-4	m. 164	m. 165	m. 165	m. 166-7	m. 168-9	m. 170	m. 170	m. 171	m. 172
C: I	V <sup>7</sup> /iii	iii	V <sup>7</sup> /IV	IV	iv	bII <sup>6</sup>	vii <sup>o7</sup> /V	V	I

c#: i	i (with B passing tone)	VI	bII <sup>6</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	i	V <sup>6</sup> <sub>5</sub>	i	E: ii	V	I	i (C: iii)
m. 1	m. 2	m. 3	m. 3	m. 4	m. 5	m. 6	m. 7	m. 7	m. 8	m. 9	m. 10

Beethoven

Appendix:  
Additional Parallels to “Moonlight”

Mendelssohn Piece/Section	Comments	Section of “Moonlight”
Viola Sonata, third movement - m. 180-5 and 196-201	The viola melody within these two sections contains some parallel intervals and scale degrees to the melody found in m. 7-9 of “Moonlight.”	First Movement – m. 7-9
Viola Sonata, third movement – m. 209	In m. 209, the minor ninth created by top voice and the bass of the $V^{b\ 9}$ chord may allude to sections within the first movement of “Moonlight” where several pronounced minor ninths appear within a similar texture.	First Movement - m. 16, 18, 52, and 54
Viola Sonata, third movement – m. 209-214	The motif, $b\ \hat{6}-\hat{5}-\#4-\hat{5}$ , found in the Viola Sonata’s melodic line can be also detected near the end of the third movement of “Moonlight” where it follows soon after another $V^{b\ 9}$ and consists of a solitary melody in the bass.	Third Movement – m. 187-9
Viola Sonata, third movement – m. 221-70	The third movement’s coda contains multiple similarities to the third movement of “Moonlight” including its opening arpeggiated gesture, the compression of its melodic and harmonic material, and its driving rhythm.	Third Movement
Viola Sonata, third movement – m. 266-70	Both the Viola Sonata and “Moonlight” conclude with a final gesture consisting of an ascending then descending arpeggiation of the tonic, followed by detached chords.	Third Movement – m. 196-200
Fantasie, Op. 28	Many, such as Todd (2003) and Leung (1990), have noted the correlations between the form and style of the Fantasie’s movements and the form and style found in “Moonlight’s” movements.	Entire sonata

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