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Intertextuality and Interpretation in Arno Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor: A Practice-Led Overview

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Abstract

This article provides a practice-led overview of the interpretative challenges and intertextual dimensions of Arno Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor (1948). Although the work remains underrepresented in the global violin repertoire, it presents a compelling synthesis of Armenian folk idioms and Western classical forms. Drawing on performance-based research and intertextual theory, the study examines how cultural references embedded in the concerto influence interpretive choices. By integrating insights from Armenian musical traditions, historical recordings, and personal performance practice, the article offers a reflective framework for re-engaging with Babajanian's concerto. It argues that understanding the concerto's intertextual elements enhances its interpretive richness and supports its reintroduction into contemporary performance contexts.

Keywords: Arno Babajanian, Intertextuality, Violin Concerto, Armenian Music

Introduction

This article examines the underrepresented Violin Concerto in A Minor (1948) by Arno Babajanian (1921—1983), a lesser-known work in the global violin repertoire despite its artistic and historical significance (Amatuni, 1985; Hakobyan, 2013). With extensive experience as a soloist, chamber musician, and educator, the author has been observing a significant lack of awareness and appreciation for Soviet violin music among Malaysian performers and audiences. Despite the inclusion of select Soviet works in violin examination syllabi, such as Khachaturian's (1903—1978). Toccata and Shostakovich's (1906—1975) Gavotte, the broader repertoire in music education, including works by composers like Arno Babajanian, as well remains largely overlooked.

Motivated by this gap, the author began incorporating Soviet compositions into her recitals, sparking interest among audiences. This led her to explore and promote underperformed works, such as Babajanian's technically demanding and stylistically unique Violin Concerto in A minor, which, despite its contributing to the development of the concerto genre in Armenia and offering a striking synthesis of Armenian folk idioms and Soviet modernist elements (Amatuni, 1985; Melikyan 2020), has been largely forgotten. Author's

efforts aim to revive and popularize this neglected repertoire, shedding light on its historical and cultural significance within the global classical music canon.

This study adopts a practice-led research approach, positioning performance itself as both a method and a mode of scholarly inquiry. Rather than separating performance from analysis, the performer-researcher draws on interpretive engagement to generate knowledge, exploring how meaning emerges through the embodied and contextual processes of music-making (Cook, 2017; Rink, 2002)

The objective of this article is to examine the intertextual elements of Babajanian's Violin Concerto and elucidate the link between Armenian folk traditions and Soviet modernism. The author posits that acknowledging the intertextual components of the concerto may facilitate diverse interpretations for its performance and reception. Such approach encourages performer's conception of the concerto as a site of intertextual negotiation. This article addresses some research and performance deficiencies by contributing to the broader context of Soviet violin music and offering a means to re-evaluate lesser-known classical compositions.

Historical Background and Cultural Context

Arno Babajanian was a prominent Armenian composer of the Soviet period. During his study time he was influenced by a combination of Armenian musical traditions and Soviet classical music. His Violin Concerto in A Minor, composed in 1948, exemplifies this fusion well. It was developed during a difficult era for artists limited by strict political constraints, necessitating the integration of traditional folk elements with official government instructions for Soviet music (Baldano, et al, 2016; Clark, 2013).

Contemporary music experts criticised the similarities with the music of Aram Khachaturian, whose Violin Concerto was premiered and achieved immediate popularity in 1940. Later, the researchers of Babajanian's concerto noted his distinct voice as well. Babajanian contrasts Armenian traditional melodies with Western musical structures in unique way, resulting in music that is both emotionally profound and intricate. The concerto conveys intense emotions, instances of spontaneity, and the emergence of new concepts in music. Studying the concerto offers insights into his developing musical style, influencing the interpretation of violin concertos within the historical context of Armenian music.

Despite its richness, the concerto was not widely disseminated during the Soviet era. It has since been studio-recorded once, by violinist Villi Mokatsyan and the Armenian SSSR Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Michael Maluntsian (1967)—18 years after the 1949 premiere in Leningrad . The earliest accessible live audio recording dates to 1949 (Musica colta, 2018) and was made for a television programme performed by the eminent Soviet violinist Leonid Kogan (1924–1982) with the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Yevgeny Mravinsky (1903-1988).

Nevertheless, the recent years have shown a modest revival of interest toward the concerto, demonstrated by video recordings of Haik Kazazyan's[1] and Samvel Ayrapetyan's[2] performances on YouTube. These performances supported the calls made by musicologists to reconsider the concerto's artistic value and historical role (Hakobyan, 2014; Tumayan, 2016; Melikyan, 2020). However, Babajanian's concerto does not have wide recognition and scholarship focus offered to his contemporaries despite the recent interest in him.

Overview of the Violin Concerto in A Minor

Structurally, the concerto follows the traditional three-movement format, but it exhibits several unconventional features. The first movement, marked Allegro, is cast in a modified sonata form, blending expansive lyricism with motoric rhythmic patterns and frequent metric modulations. The second movement, Andante sostenuto, evokes Armenian lament traditions through its modal harmony, narrow-range melodies, and expressive use of ornamentation and rubato (Amatuni, 1985). The final movement, Allegro energico, returns to rhythmic vitality and dance-like motifs, integrating asymmetrical meters and ostinato patterns reminiscent of Armenian folk dances. Each movement demonstrates Babajanian's command of orchestration and melodic invention, drawing on both Western Romantic idioms and indigenous Armenian materials (Melikyan, 2020).

Harmonically, the concerto displays a chromatic yet tonal language, with modal inflections and frequent oscillations between major and minor modalities—traits characteristic of Armenian traditional music. The violin writing is virtuosic and expressive, featuring lyrical cantilenas, wide leaps, and idiomatic passages that allow for interpretive freedom. Notably, the use of minor third intervals, *portamenti*, and melodic ornaments suggests a deep intertextual connection to Armenian ashugh[3] (bard) and peasant music, as well as the stylizations of earlier Armenian composers like Komitas (1869—1935) and Spendiaryan (1871—1928) (Amatuni, 1985; Atayan, 1965; Atayan, 2001; Melikyan, 2020).

Intertextuality Background

This article adopts an intertextual approach to Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor, examining how musical references, stylistic echoes, and genre conventions converge to create meaning and interpretation. Intertextual analysis, in this case, refers to the identification of explicit connections and those that are left to be implicit with other works, particularly those of Felix Mendelssohn (1809—1847), Alexander Glazunov (1865—1936), and Aram Khachaturian, whose violin concertos are interpretive anchors for comparison. While the formal and lyrical structures of Mendelssohn's and Glazunov's concertos offer valuable stylistic benchmarks, Babajanian, like Khachaturian, transformed these models through the layering of Armenian modal scales, folk rhythms, and ornamentation. This intertextual contrast highlights the concerto's unique cultural voice without detracting from its place in the broader Western tradition.

[1] Armen S. (2022, March 5). А. Бабаджанян: Концерт для скрипки (солист Г. Казазян, дирижер В. Гергиев) [A. Babajanian: Violin Concerto (soloist G. Kazazyan, conductor V. Gergiev)] [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nULLapMS-gc

[2] Samvel Ayrapetyan. (2021, December 13). *Arno Babajanian – Violin Concerto -Samvel Ayrapetyan (violin)* [Video]. YouTube.https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7QQcQoPwCA

[3] The ashugh (Armenian: աշուղ) is a tradition of poet-musicians in Armenian and Caucasian cultures, dating to at least the 16th century, characterized by solo vocal improvisation accompanied by instruments like the saz or kamancha, often with lyrical themes of love, nature, and spiritual devotion. Distinct from the older ensemble-based gusan tradition, ashughs emphasize individual artistry, blending folk melodies with metric poetry, and remain influential in contemporary Armenian musical identity (Harutyunyan, 2021; Nercessian, 2001)."

The article explores how the use of Armenian folk components (e.g., modal melodies, ornamental gestures, and irregular rhythmic patterns), implemented by Babajanian in the concerto construes intertextually with the score's formal structure. These elements are studied not only relative to Armenian musical tradition but in the context of the wider environment of the Western art music. In this way, through the discovery of these intertextual layers, the research reveals how the performers could interact with the work as a field of cultural negotiations, informed intuitions, and active expression. This approach encourages a nuanced understanding of the work, inviting performers to explore its rich cultural references and interpretive possibilities, thus contributing to the ongoing revitalization of lesser-known works in the violin repertoire

Definition and Theoretical Framework

Intertextuality emerged initially from literary theory. Its impact has grown in musicology and performance studies. It is grounded in the dialogic theories of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), who foregrounded the fundamentally dialogic character of texts. In The Dialogic Imagination (2010), Bakhtin claimed that each text "remembers" its past, interacting with other texts and voices in a dynamic conversation. Discursive interplay between works and their socio/theoretical context, which is the principle of dialogism, placed in the center of the modern theoretical apparatus the relation between literature and history, culture and transcultural issues.

Kristeva (1980) developed the term intertextuality based on the ideas of Bakhtin. She characterised it as the occurrence of one or more texts within another, in which meaning is produced within a network of relationality rather than individual works. Since then, the term has expanded to include music, especially in the study of stylistic influence and referential composition. Kevin Korsyn (1991) approaches Harold Bloom's concept of the anxiety of influence to music, where acts of composing are a grappling with predecessors' voices. For Korsyn, intertextuality in music is a reworking dialogue with previous works and the transformation of the familiar into something new.

Academics have emphasised the extensive ramifications of intertextuality in performance. Beard and Gloag (2016) perceive conscious and unconscious musical references as impacting compositional and interpretive actions, while Hatten (2004, 2008) supports a model of intertextuality that is governed by style and situational application, cautioning against extensive or radical interpretations.

More recently, Kramer (2021) reconceptualised musical intertextuality as an ever-changing event. He claims that intertextuality does not belong to the score but is performed through cognitive paraphrase, in which performers interact with the past, culture, and style. The motion of engagement converts interpretation into a nonconsolidating, recontextualizing process. According to Kramer, music works as the product and producer of intertextuality, with the performer playing a key role in the process.

Kiana Shafiei (2018), studied Persian musical references in the works of contemporary Iranian composers using performative approach. Drawing on Rink's (2002) concept of informed intuition, she moves the performer to the centre of the intertextual reading process.

Her concept positions interpretation as both an intellectual and artistic endeavour, whereby actors embody intertextual comprehension via their interpretative choices.

Intertextual Elements in Babajanian's Concerto

Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A minor has intricate intertextual implications that amalgamate traditional Armenian elements with Western classical legacy into a cohesive whole. The intertextual components are not decorative. They influence the emotional and structural aspects of work. The concerto exemplifies Hatten's (2004, 2018) artistic strategy, a purposeful fusion of cultural and musical influences to form a hybrid language of creative expression.

Amatuni (1985) identifies two primary harmonic characteristics of Armenian folk music that significantly influenced Babajanian's compositional approach.The first pertains to the adaptability of tonic centres, including dual tonics or tonal drift; the second involves altered tones that oscillate between major and minor inflections in the same mode.

The main theme of the first movement, Allegro, mixes strong rhythms with flowing melodies, featuring unique modal sounds and shifting tones oscillating between major and minor inflections (Figure 1) within the same mode (Amatuni, 1985).

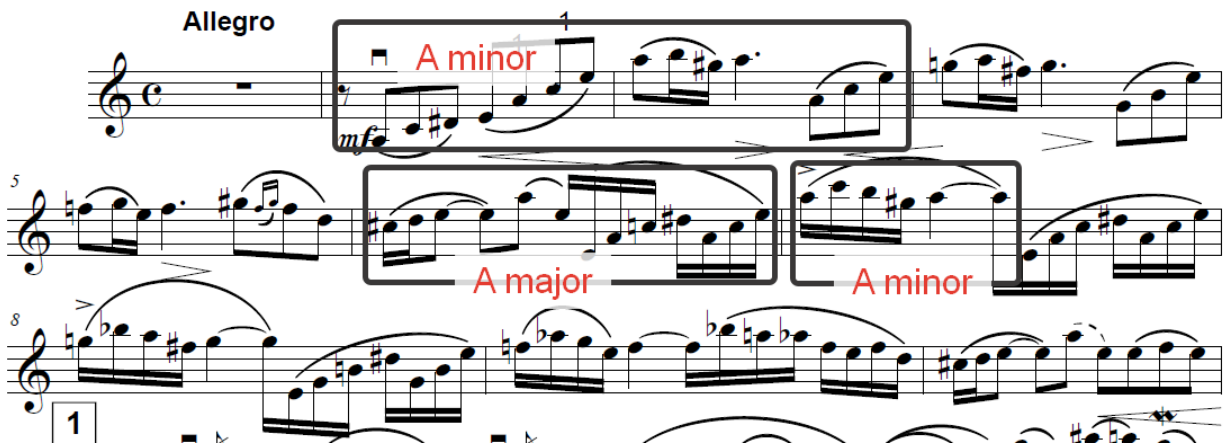

Figure 1 Babajanian, Violin Concerto in A Minor, Allegro, mm 1–10: Shifting tones oscillating between major and minor inflections.

The first section of the main theme of the Allegro, raised fourth degree (Figure 2) associates with the Hijaz scale in Armenian maqam traditions (Maqam World, n.d.).

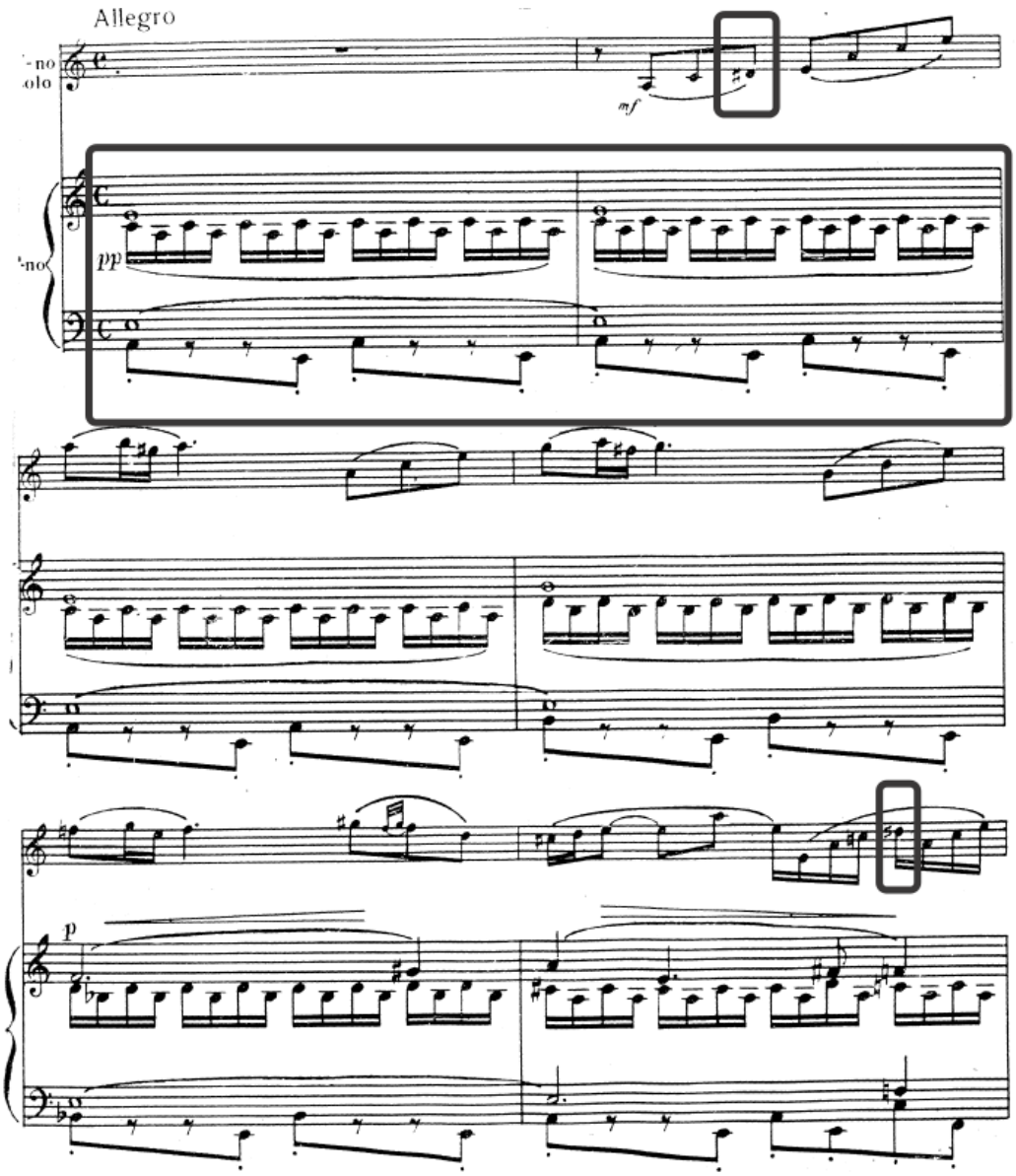

Figure 2 Babajanian, Violin Concerto in A Minor, Allegro, mm 1–8: Raised fourth degree associated with the Hijaz scale in Armenian maqam traditions.

At the same time, the orchestra accompaniment is reminiscent of the Felix Mendelssohn violin concerto opening measures, where the opening minor thirds of the strings are accompanied by a tonic-dominant accompaniment in the bass, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Mendelssohn, Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64, Allegro; mm 1–6: Strings' semiquaver runs are accompanied by a tonic-dominant moves in the bass

The intertextual relationship with Armenian folk modality is highlighted in the cadenza of the first movement, when Babajanian utilises successive modal cells derived from maqam melodic idioms. The violin segment in measure 3 (Figure 4) has a sequence of symmetrical tetrachords alternating between augmented and minor seconds, producing a bimodal ambiguity often seen in the improvisational segments of kamancha[4] or duduk[5] performances by ashughs.

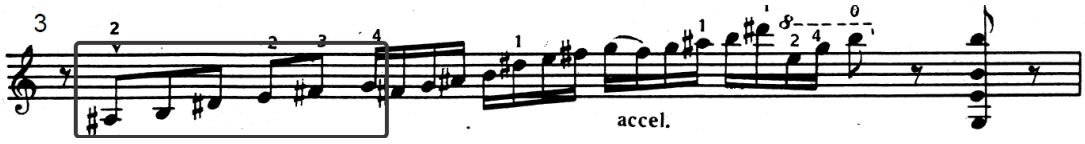

Figure 4 Babajanian, Violin Concerto in A Minor, Cadenza fragment, measure 3: Series of symmetrical tetrachords

The slow second movement, Andante sostenuto, dives deep into introspective themes, echoing Armenian lament traditions. The bass strings and brass establish an A, while the top woodwinds and violins delineate a Phrygian-like contour beginning on E, thereby generating a first tonal ambiguity (Figure 5).

[4] The kamancha is a traditional bowed string instrument with a round body and long neck, commonly used in Armenian, Persian, Azerbaijani, and Central Asian music. Played upright on the knee, it produces a nasal, expressive tone suited for both lyrical melodies and ornamented folk idioms. In Armenian music, it plays a vital role in ashugh traditions and folk ensembles (Pahlevanian, 2001; Nettl, 1987).

[5] The duduk is a traditional Armenian double-reed woodwind made of apricot wood, known for its warm, mournful tone and use of microtonal ornamentation. Often played in pairs (melody and drone), it is central to Armenian folk music and was recognized by UNESCO in 2008 as Intangible Cultural Heritage (Pahlevanian et al., 2011; Nercessian, 2001).

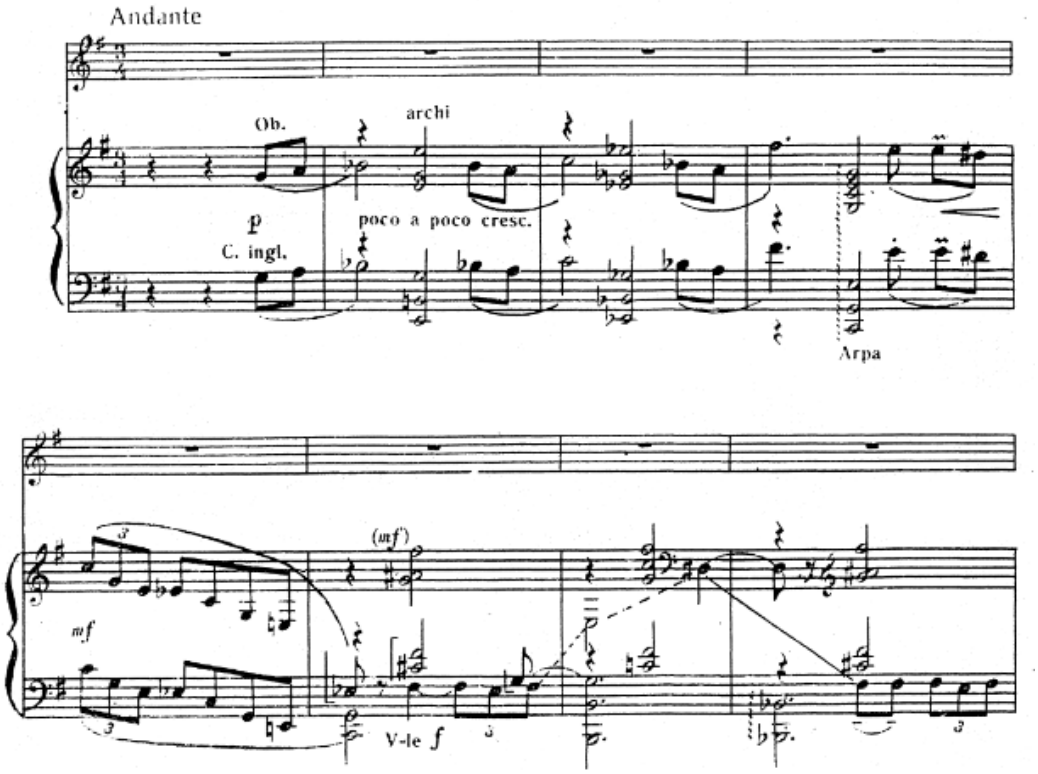

Figure 5 Babajanian, Violin Concerto in A Minor, Andante, mm 1–8: The texture exposing the contrasts in tonal ambiguity

According to Amatuni (1985), the vertical stacking of monodic lines originating from several folk scales is characteristic of Armenian ashugh music, although it has been adapted here into a quasi-polyphonic symphonic style. When the solo violin enters in measure 20 (Figure 6), it performs a different modal gesture that puts emphasis on D♯ while this tone produces tonal dissonance against the orchestra's secondary core centre of G♯.

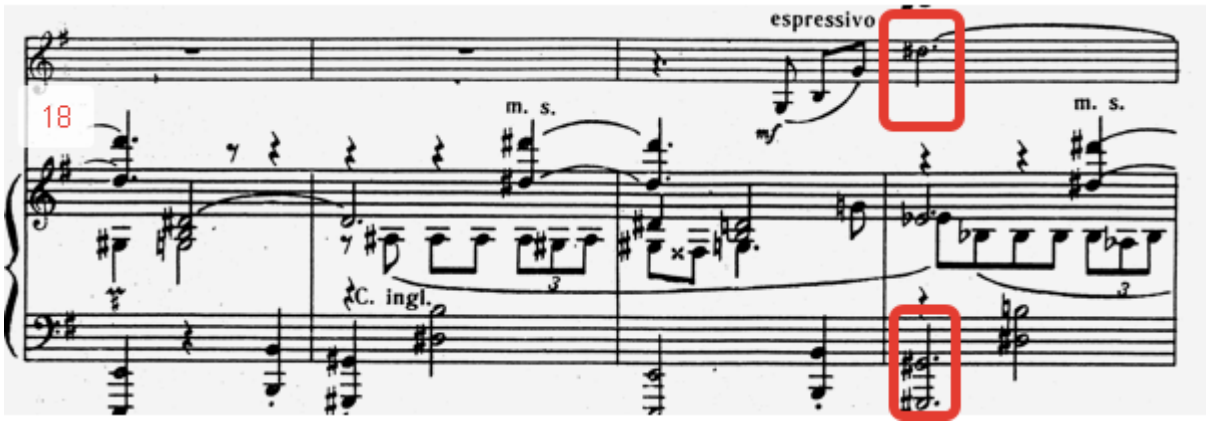

Figure 6 Babajanian, Violin Concerto in A Minor, Andante, measures 18—29: First theme
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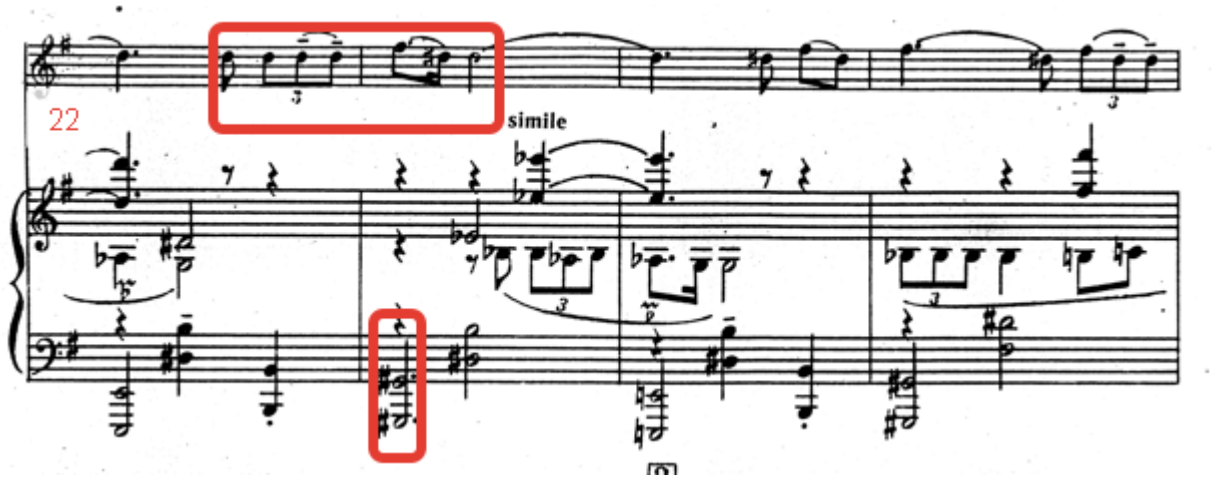

This modal tension—the friction between two non-resolving centres—illustrates Babajanian's implementation of dual tonic theory, as articulated by Amatuni (1985), grounded in peasant song traditions where melodies transition between central tones without cadence in the Western context.

The final movement (Allegro Vivace) reinforces the concerto's engagement with Western formal and stylistic paradigms while incorporating rhythmic and motivic features that suggest an individualized synthesis. At a structural level, the movement adopts a rondo-sonata hybrid design—a form commonly employed in 19th- and early 20th-century concertos—allowing for the alternation of contrasting episodes within a stable thematic framework (Amatuni, 1985). The main theme is characterised by a dance-like rhythmic impetus, syncopated accents, and motoric propulsion, features that resonate with the finale traditions of Romantic and early modernist concertos by composers such as Glazunov and Khachaturian (Coroiu, 2021; Talbot, 2001). While the stylistic affinity to Khachaturian—Babajanian's mentor and frequent collaborator—is widely acknowledged (Amatuni, 1985; Hakobyan, 2014; Melikyan, 2020), the treatment of thematic material in this movement demonstrates a more economical motivic development and a tighter integration of Armenian rhythmic cells, distinguishing Babajanian's idiom within the Soviet concerto lineage. (Figure 7).

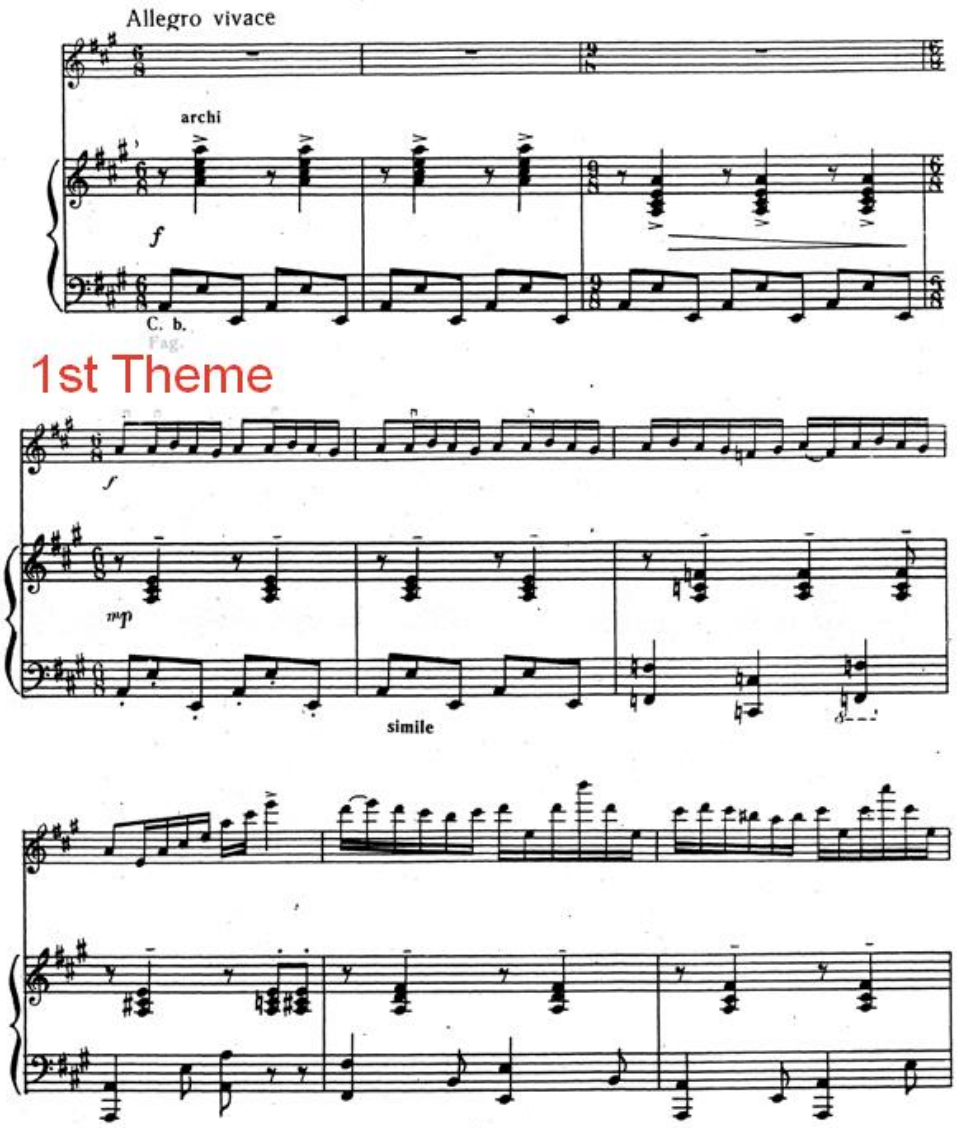

Figure 7 Babajanian, Violin concerto in A minor, third movement, Allegro Vivace: first theme mm. 1–16]

The contrasting episodes within the movement exhibit lyrical material that, while complementary to the rhythmic intensity of the principal theme, introduces modal inflections and chromatic colourations that subtly depart from traditional Western harmonic expectations. This juxtaposition of expressive registers contributes to the overall formal coherence of the movement while also reinforcing the cross-cultural stylistic layering central to Babajanian's compositional aesthetic (Figure 8).

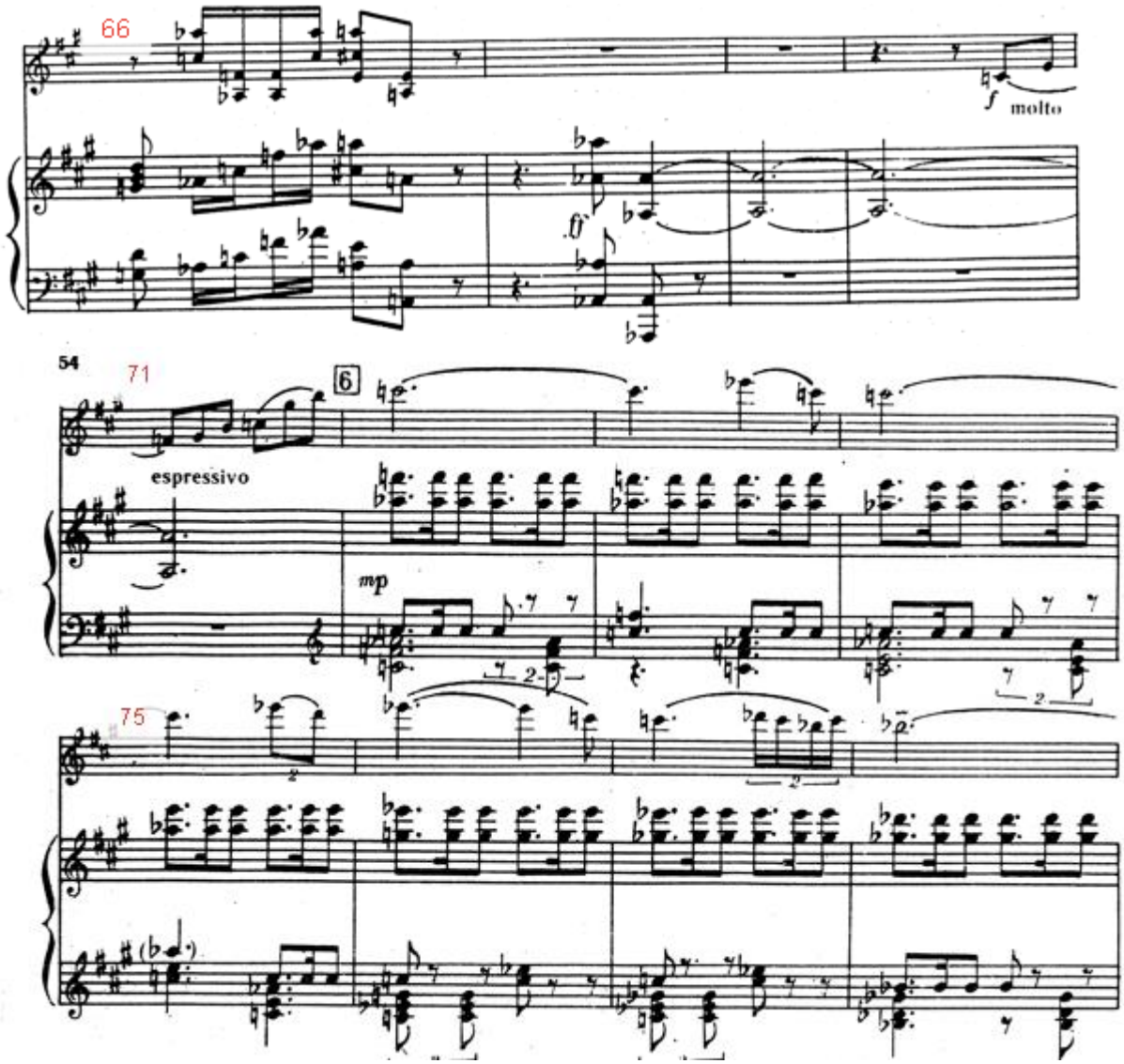

Figure 8 Babajanian, Violin concerto in A minor, third movement, Allegro Vivace: contrasting lyrical episode mm. 66–78

Orchestration is essential in emphasising these differences. The transitions from percussive tutti accompaniment to more intimate textures support the soloist's thematic variations. This orchestral composition is nimble, reactive, and dynamically diverse. It aligns with mid-20th century Soviet orchestral traditions that highlight bright instrumental timbre and purity of expression (Schwarz, 1965). Nonetheless, the incorporation of these elements into a cohesive framework demonstrates Babajanian's distinct formal mastery and expressive purpose.

One of the most prominent intertextual aspects is the melodic use of characteristic intervals for Armenian music, such as the frequent appearance of the minor second and augmented second across the movements. In Armenian ashugh and peasant song traditions, these intervals are not merely expressive ornaments but serve as essential structural markers, shaping melodic direction and modality (Atayan, 1965; Petrosyan & Bobokhyan, 2015). The use of these intervals, emblematic of Armenian ashugh and peasant song traditions, anchor the work within a recognizable national idiom while allowing expressive ambiguity.

Babajanian draws on this idiom by embedding these intervals within modal frameworks that evoke traditional Armenian scales, unique to Armenian folk practice (Poladian, 1942).

Through this approach, he not only reinforces a distinctly national musical identity but also enables expressive ambiguity that bridges folk and classical languages. For instance, the minor third and augmented second, sometimes implied, often descending are used as a motivic cell that recurs in both lyrical and dance-like sections lending continuity across contrasting moods. The main theme of the Allegro prominently features minor thirds and augmented seconds, evoking the modal flavor of Armenian folk music and contributing to the theme's distinctive ethnic character and expressive tension (Figure 9).

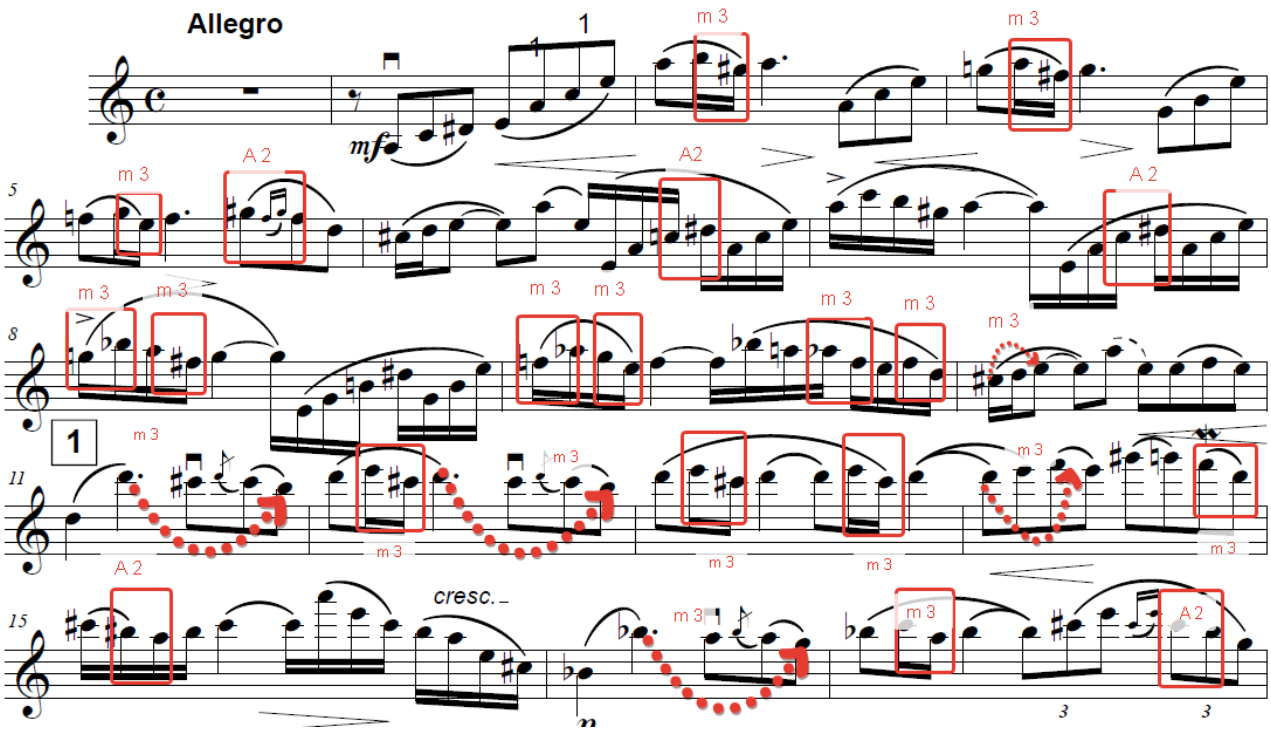

Figure 9 Babajanian, Violin concerto in A minor, first movement, Allegro, mm 1-18: Minor thirds and augmented seconds in the main theme

Similarly, the augmented second appears in scalar fragments that gesture toward traditional lament melodies, particularly in the slow movement Andante sostenuto (Figure 10).

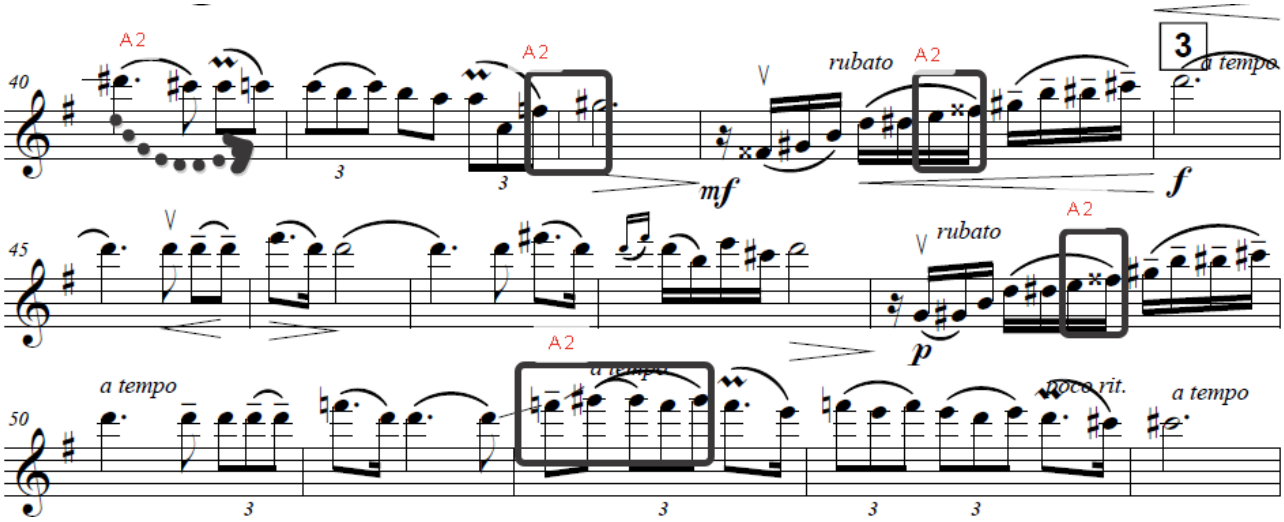

Figure 10 Babajanian, Violin concerto in A minor, second movement, Andante Sostenuto, mm 40-53: A passage from the second movement where the augmented second evokes an Armenian lament melody.

This intertextual layer is also provided by the rhythmic dimension. Metres resemble skips and jumps, phrases are asymmetrical, sparking syncopated motives recollect the traditional Armenian dances (Melikyan, 2020). These patterns do not only operate as stylistic allusions but as formal resources, which effect coherence and momentum. For example, the motif of the Allegro Vivace, skilfully arranged, is presented in high registers with a dance-like rhythmic organisation in the orchestra accompaniment (Figure 11).

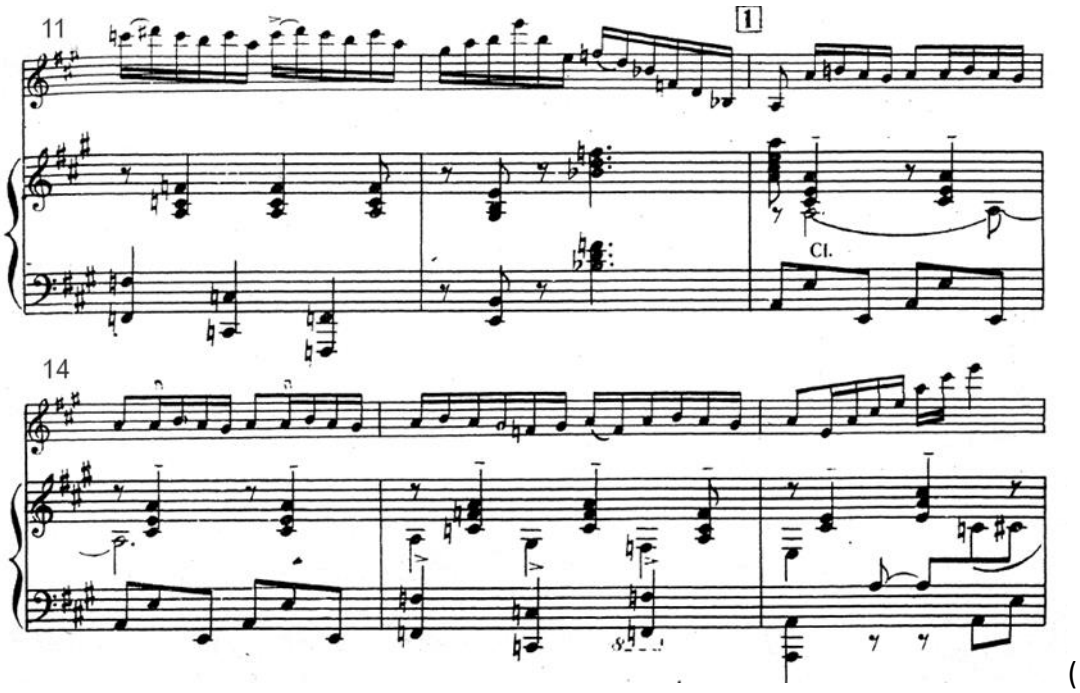

Figure 11 Babajanian, Violin Concerto in A Minor, Allegro Vivace, mm 11–16: The main theme of the Allegro Vivace is presented in high registers with a dance-like rhythmic organisation in the orchestra accompaniment

Notably, in the violin concerto, Babajanian writes mordents, glissandos and grace notes more often than acciaccaturas and thrills. Amatuni (1985) further points out that in using neighbouring tones so pervasively throughout his works, Babajanian actually composes ornamentally by nature. Melismatic elements in violin part – in particular grace notes, and glissandi – further recalls vocal techniques in Armenian folk and liturgical music (Figure 12). In the same time this evokes the expressive style of duduk players or ashugh singers.

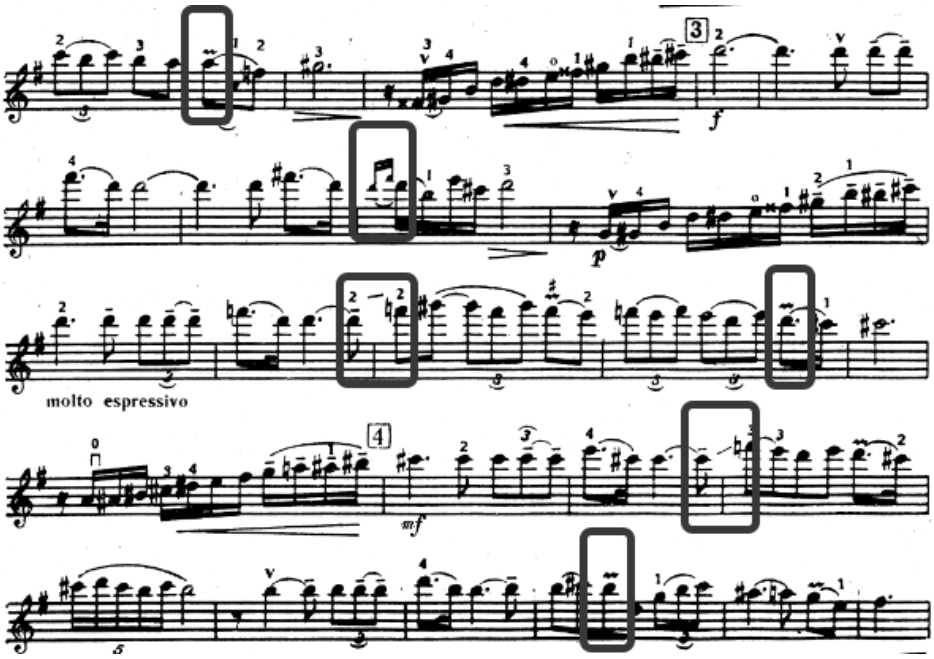

Figure12 Babajanian, Violin Concerto, Allegro, mordents, acciaccaturas, and glissandos

Connections to Western Classical Tradition

Babajanian's intertextual voice is in deep conversation with the Western and Soviet classical canon, creating a multi-layered sense of style. Formal architecture of the first movement of the concerto is based on a modified sonata form. While not explicitly derivative, the first movement's certain stylistic features suggest possible resonances with the violin concertos of composers such as Felix Mendelssohn and Alexander Glazunov, besides Khachaturian's concerto. Such observations are based on analytical interpretation rather than documented compositional intent and should be understood as indicative rather than definitive.

The movement's formal outline includes an exposition with contrasting thematic material, a development section of considerable textural complexity, and a recapitulation that integrates prior motivic elements. The use of post-Romantic harmonic language and expansive orchestration contributes to a layered stylistic idiom that suggests familiarity with Soviet modernism and the broader European concerto tradition.

A clear connection with Glazunov's concerto emerges in the shared tonality of A minor in the opening movement. Furthermore, Babajanian deepens the link by introducing a striking departure from convention in the second theme, which appears unexpectedly in D♭ major (Figure 13)—an enharmonic shift that subverts functional harmony, thus creates tonal ambiguity and emotional distance.

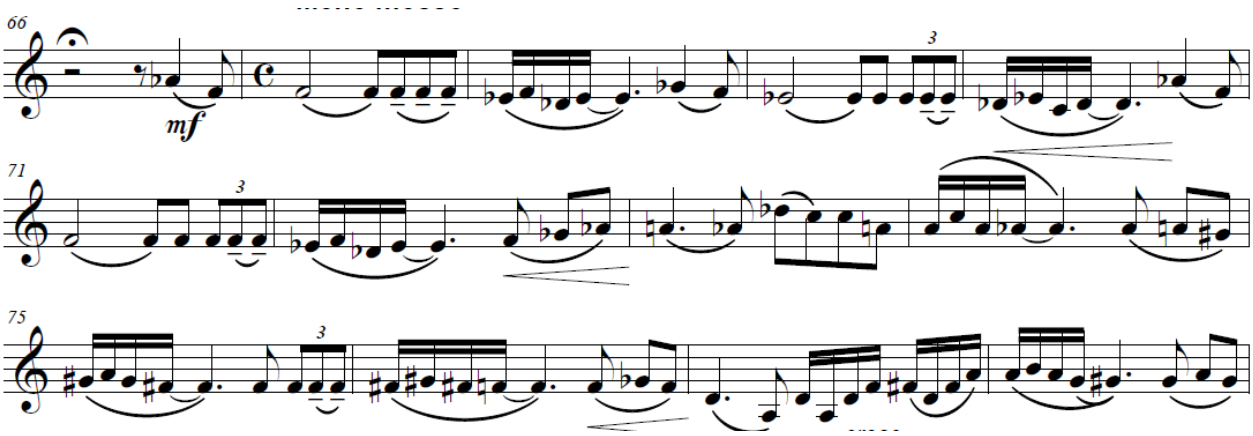

Figure 13 Babajanian, Violin Concerto in A Minor, Allegro, mm 66—78

This non-functional tonal shift, shared with Glazunov's Concerto Andante episode in D♭ (Figure 14), is an intertextual nod, but also a radical reinterpretation.

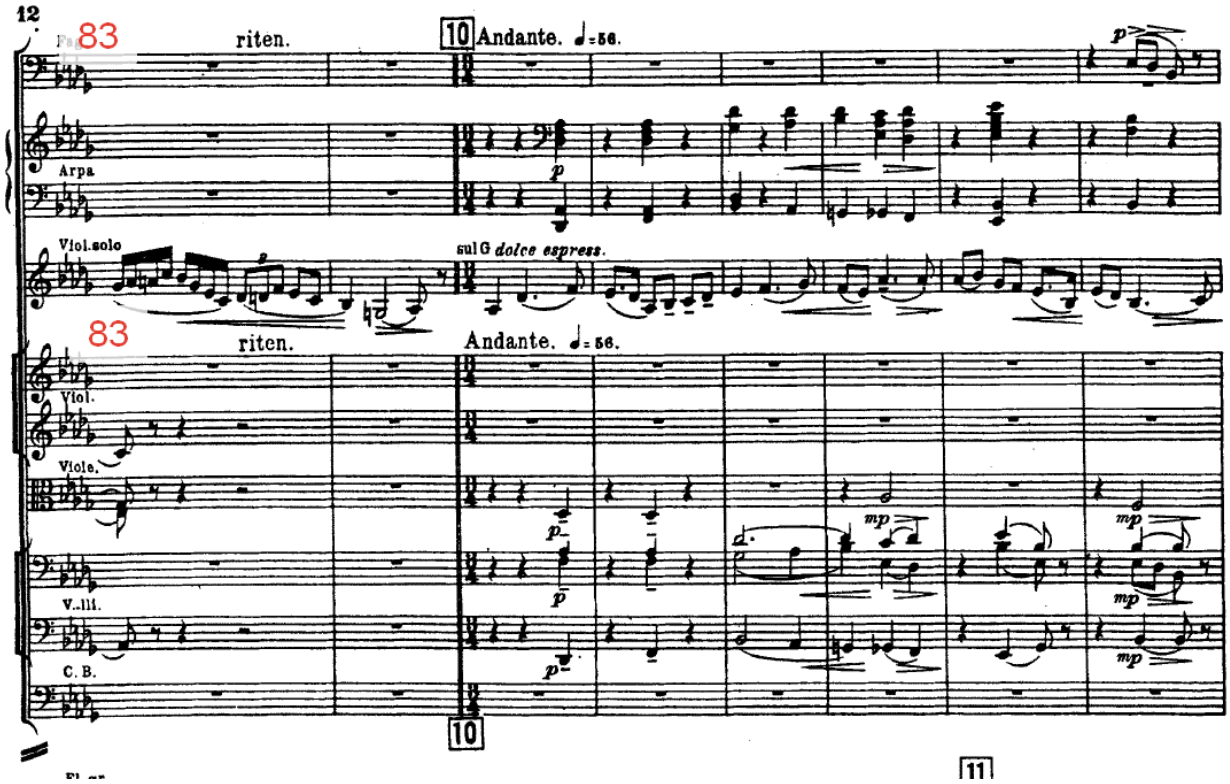

Figure 14 *A.* Glazunov, Violin concerto, mm83—90: Andante in Db major

The choice of the D♭ major creates a suspended harmonic space that contrasts with the surrounding material, functioning less as a traditional second theme and more as a lyrical digression. This approach reflects an expressive sensibility aligned with Armenian modal aesthetics and may be interpreted as a deviation from Western functional tonality in favor of atmosphere and emotional displacement.

The second movement (Andante sostenuto) of Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor maintains an expressive engagement with Western stylistic idioms, particularly those associated with the Romantic concerto tradition. The lyrical, cantabile nature of the solo violin line (Figure 15) recalls the slow movements of 19th-century concertos. Babajanian's solo writing is similarly characterised by long-breathed, arching phrases and expressive ornamentation, often supported by restrained orchestral textures that serve to highlight the violin's vocal qualities.

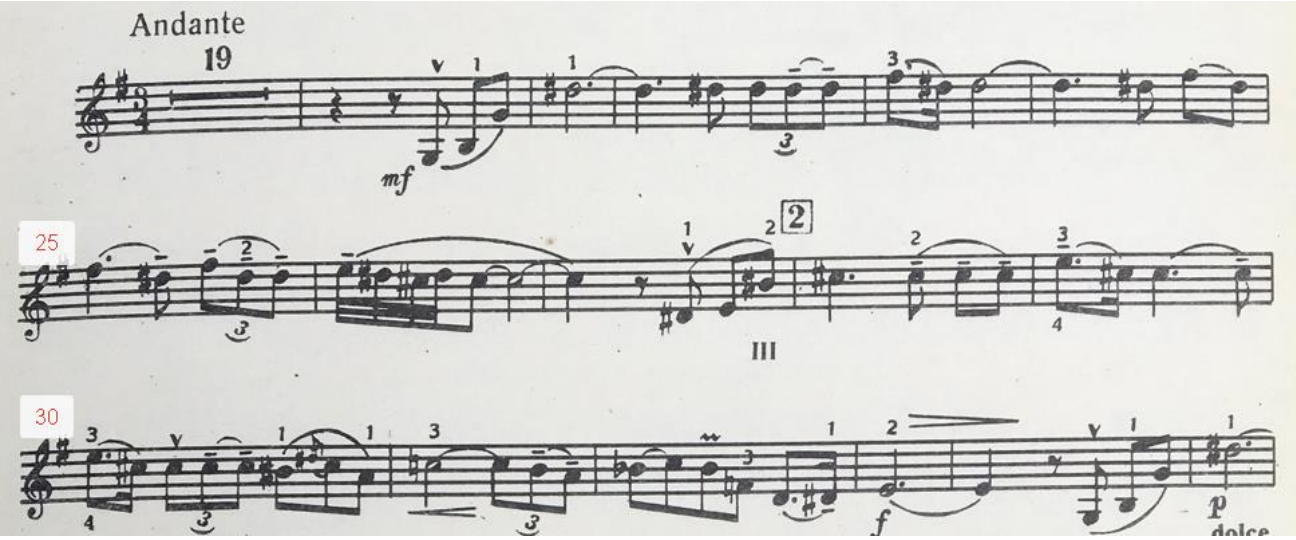

Figure 15 Babajanian, Concerto, 2nd movement, mm. 1-34: Lyrical, cantabile nature of the solo violin line

While the movement initially suggests a ternary (ABA) design, closer analysis reveals fluid transitions between thematic zones, making precise formal delineation problematic. Instead of a clearly articulated return to the A section, Babajanian employs motivic transformation and rhythmic variation (Figure 16) to generate continuity, consistent with modernist preferences for organic development over symmetrical structure (Cook, 1994).

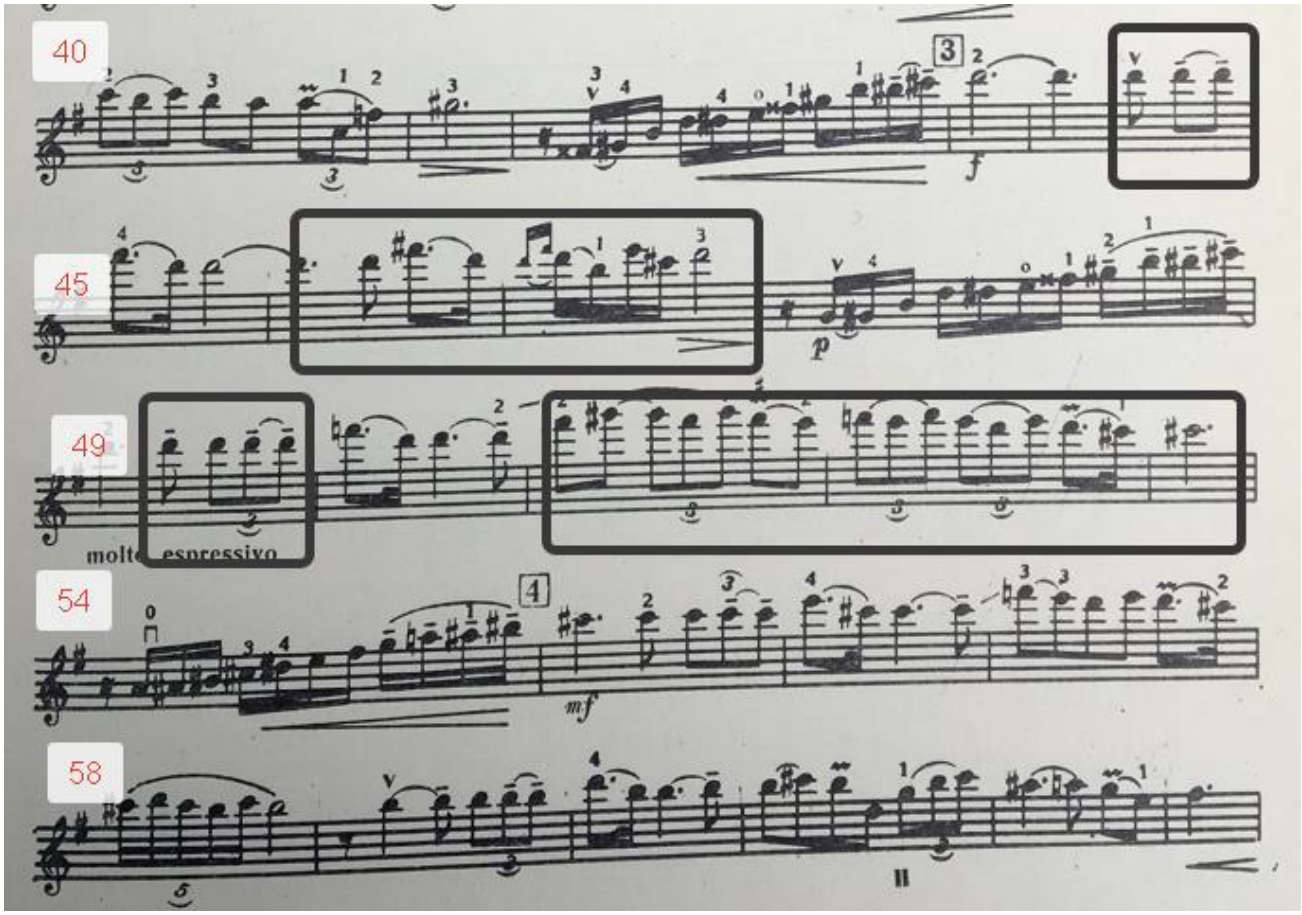

Figure16 Babajanian, Concerto, 2nd movement, mm. 40—63: motivic and rhythmical transformation of A material

The orchestration throughout remains transparent and supportive. The use of sustained strings, minimal doubling, and avoidance of full orchestral climaxes allows the solo violin to project introspective affective states without dramatic interference. This treatment parallels aspects of neoromanticism, where emotional immediacy and tonal clarity are often preserved within contemporary harmonic contexts (Simmons, 2006; Whittall, 2003).

Babajanian's approach, however, is not derivative. While the stylistic features of melody, form, and texture align with broader neoromantic or neoclassical trends, his treatment appears highly individualised. The shaping of the second movement avoids pastiche, instead functioning as a reinterpretation of familiar models within a unique expressive idiom. As such, these aesthetic parallels should be interpreted not as direct borrowings but as part of a broader intercultural and intertextual dialogue, in which Western forms are assimilated and recontextualised through Babajanian's compositional voice.

The third movement's motoric rhythms and energetic violin figurations echo the virtuosic finales of concertos by Glazunov and Khachaturian. Yet these references are recontextualized through the lens of Armenian rhythm and modality, resulting in a hybrid that resists categorization.

This interplay of materials that are folk-derived and classical goes along with Kramer's (2021) concept of adjacency, a tie between texts based on the recognition of their integrity

but also allowing for mutually enlightening juxtaposition. In case of Babajanian, this adjacency transforms into the locus where the expressive transformation is possible, and therefore, performer is able to “explore” several interpretive strata simultaneously.

In conclusion, while all movements incorporate familiar formal and stylistic aspects of Western concerto tradition, Babajanian's reconfiguration of these components within a rhythmically and harmonically sophisticated framework highlights his creative independence. The allusions to previous models are thus interpretative rather than imitative, positioning the concerto within a global modernist framework that concurrently interacts with and redefines old paradigms.

Interpreting Lesser-Known Works: The Role of Historical Context, Performer Agency, and Intertextuality

Playing a work either for a live audience or in a recording session defines performance, and artistic decisions implemented by performers during performance are called interpretations (Cook, 2013; Dreyfus, 2022). Dreyfus notes, that interpretation" signifies a specific type of musical performance, usually of historical works of significant value. Cook (2013) emphasises that performance involves the nuanced art of telling details beyond musical texts. Dreyfus (2022) warns that term ‘interpretation’ if applied indiscriminately can become too vague. It’s not only about playing notes expressively or differently. It about understanding that the music possess its own internal logic and rhetorical force, independent of the original work.

Dreyfus attributes “personal reading” to interpretation (Dreyfus, 2022). He claims that it is not formed in a vacuum but is shaped by the performer's interaction with an extensive network of musical and cultural “texts”. This is intertextual structure that covers the inception to various musical genres, past performance practices, theoretical treatises and culture phenomena (Cook, 2013; Klein, 2005). Dreyfus indirectly acknowledges dialogism of the texts, aligning with Bakhtin’s (2010) concept of dialogism, which views texts as inherently relational and shaped by their interaction with other texts, by highlighting how interpretations are not neutral performances but rather arguments or claims about the music in relation to existing understandings and performance traditions (Dreyfus, 2022).

Scholars such as Nicholas Cook (2013), Lydia Goehr (1992), John Rink (2002), and Richard Taruskin (1995) have significantly contributed to the understanding of interpretation as an intertextual act in music. Cook emphasizes that performance involves a dynamic interaction with musical texts, enriched by the performer’s contextual understanding and expressive choices. Goehr explores the conceptual boundaries of the "work-concept," arguing that the idea of a musical work is historically contingent and shaped by evolving interpretive norms. Rink focuses on performance as a site of analysis, advocating for performer agency and interpretive plurality informed by historical and stylistic interconnections. He also emphasizes the performer’s active role in creating meaning (Rink, 2002). Taruskin (1995) critiques the notion of historically "authentic" performance, highlighting that all interpretation is mediated by present-day knowledge and cultural frameworks. Collectively, these perspectives frame interpretation not as a fixed or isolated act, but as an ongoing intertextual dialogue between the performer, the score, and broader historical and cultural influences.

Understanding a work's historical context, a key element in interpretation of lesser known works, is inherently intertextual. It involves placing the work within a network of related compositions, performance practices, and cultural influences from its time (Cook, 2013; Goehr, 1992; Rink, 2002; Taruskin, 1995).). Interpretation goes beyond simply playing the notes on the page; it involves bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience to the performance (Hatten, 2008; Korsyn, 1991). This includes knowledge of other musical works, performance styles, and cultural contexts – all elements of intertextuality. Therefore, interpretation of lesser known works can be understood as an intertextual act where the performer draws on their knowledge of other musical and cultural "texts" to create a meaningful and persuasive performance. This intertextual engagement shapes their choices and informs their "reading" of the work, contributing to the ongoing dialogue between musical works and their interpretations across time, and allowing each performance to resonate with both historical depth and contemporary relevance (Cook, 2021; Kramer, 2021; Shafiei, 2018).

Rather than reviving a centuries-old practise, Shafiei (2018) highlights the importance of the performer agency and intuition in such cases of interpretations and in the context of the artistic research specifically. Such an approach stimulates musicians to find that right balance between analytical insight and context-specific creativity and, as a result, make unfamiliar works a meaningful art statement. By creating a constellation of interconnections between less familiar compositions and thematically or stylistically congruent repertoire, performers create intertextual resonance and discover new interpretive space.

This interpretative agency is especially pertinent when engaging with works that allow for expressive flexibility, such as the Violin Concerto in A Minor by Arno Babajanian. Babajanian's compositions exhibit significant rhythmic and melodic suggestiveness while allowing enough room for nuanced interpretation choices. Performers are urged to create phrases using tempo rubato, nuanced dynamic shading, while considering the intertextual dialogue among folk idioms, the expressiveness of Armenian music culture, and the Western concert tradition. These interpretive dimensions become especially evident when examining contrasting recorded performances.

In Kogan's 1949 performance [6] (Musica colta, 2018), the playing projects the trademarks of Moscow violin school which emphasizes the on unique characteristics that define the approach to violin performance, including articulation and energy – lucidity, discipline, structure (Iankelevich, 2016; Safonova, 2020; Shih et al., 2017). Kogan takes a rhythmically shaped and metrically restrained method, whose performance features are clear articulation, steady vibrato and tempo. Together with open romantic expressivity, his interpretation commits to technical command and a sound that is full bodied as well as expressive and strong, getting at the inner architecture of the music through clarity and strength. (Safonova, 2020).

In contrast, Haik Kazazyan (2020) in his interpretation emphasizes the emotional urgency towards greater dramatic contouring, as it was suggested by the Hakobyan (2013).

[6] This analysis refers to Kogan's 1948 live performance, not the more commonly available commercial recording. The online version of the commercial recording suffers from pitch distortion, and the original physical copy is currently inaccessible from Malaysia.

This performance is characterised by pronounced rhetorical gestures and an ample phrasing, accentuating expressive nature of the concerto[7]. The high frequency of the use of expressive portamento invokes Armenian vocal practises, especially the ones related to the traditional Armenian instrumental playing. Kazazyan does this by modulating the pace, infusing each phrase with more structure and emotion, and so enriching the narrative of the piece. Subtle rubato, wide use of agogic accents, and decorative slides contribute to idiomatic placement of interpretation into Armenian performance traditions. In the meantime, though Kazazyan's phrasing and tonal palette express a contemporary sense of aesthetics, the performance is placed within a neoclassical interpretive domain that appeals to the contemporary listener.

Such variations demonstrate how performers—guided by their stylistic orientation and situational awareness—engaged with the score as a site of translation. Kogan embodied the expressive norms of his era, characterised by formal coherence, elegance, and Soviet virtuosity. Kazazyan, by contrast, brings a contemporary clarity that blends expressive nuance with Armenian idioms. Both approaches are legitimate and revealing, each reactivating the concerto's expressive potential in a distinct way.

By means of such decisions – nuances of tempo, articulation, vibrato or phrasing, the performer embodies an act of interpretive authorship. Performance is a narrative construction, as Cook (2001, 2013) takes on, culturally and contextually located. In this way, interpretation of lesser-known works becomes a curatorial job, exhorting audiences to connect with neglected repertoire not as ancient artefacts, but as living texts which can carry new meanings.

Conclusion

The interpretative possibilities of Arno Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor were investigated in this paper using practice-led performance, cultural memory, and intertextuality. This underlines that the performer's function goes beyond accuracy to the score to include a creative need to interact with the deeper stylistic and cultural resonances buried in the piece. Inspired by Bakhtin (2010), Klein (2005), Cook (1999, 2013, 2017), and Rink (2002), conversation emphasizes how performance naturally entails conversation with past musical, historical, and cultural relics.

By means of a score study, comparison listening, and live performance, this research combines theoretical analysis with interpretative experience using a practice-led approach. Elements such as the synergy of Armenian folk idioms, Soviet style standards, and Western classical tradition are most clearly reflected in the act of performance of Babajanian concertos.

Comparative listening to recordings by Leonid Kogan and Haik Kazazyan shows how strongly phrasing, articulation, and pace could affect the concerto's emotive character. While Kazazyan offers a more emotionally complex and folk-inflected version, relying on Armenian cultural references, Kogan's technique recalls the artistic rigour of Soviet mid-century performance. These opposing interpretations show how actor agency and intertextual understanding produce different, but equally fascinating, creative results.

[7] This refers to Kazazyan's 2021 live performance available via [platform or broadcaster name if known], which is selected for its interpretive clarity and technical fidelity. Other commercial recordings by Kazazyan, if any, were not used due to limited accessibility or differing interpretive focus.

As an interpretative co-author, the performer performs a historically and culturally contextual act of meaning-making—what Cook (2001, 2013) calls narrative construction. For less well-known pieces such as this concerto, performance becomes a kind of reactivation—a dynamic reinterpretation that gives an under-represented repertoire fresh importance rather than a passive replication of the past.

From Armenian ashugh traditions to Soviet symphonic rhetoric, the intertextual relationships investigated in this piece provide not only theoretical insights but also useful reference for phrasing, tone colour, and pace structuring. Interpretation then becomes an enactment of cultural and artistic memory, a link between the historical background and modern manifestation.

This paper adds to scholarly knowledge on Soviet-era repertoire by providing a new interpretative framework based on intertextuality and performance analysis, therefore increasing the educational tools at hand for violin teachers and students.

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