

INTERTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVES IN PERFORMING
ARNO BABAJANIAN'S VIOLIN CONCERTO
IN A MINOR

MAYYA ANATOLEVNA MUSAEVA

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation examines intertextuality in Arno Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor. The aim is to reveal connections to Armenian folk traditions and selected works by Armenian and Western composers. Based Kiana Shafiei's framework idea, the research employs practice-led design method illustrate how intertextual components influence our perception through musical analysis and reflective performance. It investigates three primary objectives: examining the essence of intertextuality in music, recognising such connections in Babajanian's concerto, and comprehending how to implement this in the performance. The analysis focusses on rhythm, melody, harmony, and stylistic characteristics that embody national identity with broader creative tendencies. The results indicate that intertextual knowledge enhances interpretive options, facilitating more nuanced and expressive performances. This study prompts a reevaluation of the concerto's artistic value and adds to the broader revival of overlooked Soviet-era violin repertoire.





PERSPEKTIF INTERTEKSTUAL DALAM MEMPERSEMBAHKAN KONCERTO BIOLA ARNO BABAJANIAN DALAM A MINOR

ABSTRAK

Disertasi ini mengkaji intertekstualiti dalam Konserto Violin dalam A Minor oleh Arno Babajanian. Tujuannya adalah untuk mendedahkan hubungan dengan tradisi rakyat Armenia serta karya-karya terpilih oleh komposer Armenia dan Barat. Berdasarkan kerangka idea Kiana Shafiei, kajian ini menggunakan kaedah reka bentuk berasaskan amalan untuk menggambarkan bagaimana elemen-elemen intertekstual mempengaruhi persepsi kita melalui analisis muzik dan persembahan reflektif. Kajian ini menyasarkan tiga objektif utama: meneliti inti pati intertekstualiti dalam muzik, mengenal pasti hubungan tersebut dalam konserto Babajanian, dan memahami cara mengaplikasikannya dalam persembahan. Analisis tertumpu kepada ritma, melodi, harmoni, dan ciri-ciri gaya yang mewakili identiti kebangsaan dengan kecenderungan kreatif yang lebih luas. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pengetahuan tentang intertekstualiti memperluas pilihan interpretasi, seterusnya membolehkan persembahan yang lebih bernuansa dan ekspresif. Kajian ini mendorong penilaian semula terhadap nilai artistik konserto tersebut dan menyumbang kepada kebangkitan semula repertoire violin era Soviet yang sebelum ini kurang mendapat perhatian



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



In the mid-20th century, violin compositions from Soviet composers such as Dmitri Shostakovich, Aram Khachaturian, Sergey Prokofiev, and Dmitri Kabalevsky gained widespread recognition. However, works by composers from Soviet republics, including Armenia's Arno Babajanian (1921–1983), were overshadowed due to censorship and lack of exposure (Schwarz, 1965). Babajanian, a pianist and composer known for over 200 popular songs and film scores, initially gained recognition for his classical works, which were often compared to those of his contemporaries (Melikyan, 2020; Arshakyan, 2012). Yet his technically complex Violin Concerto in A Minor, despite its uniqueness, faded into obscurity (Tamiroglyan, 2016; Melikyan, 2020). Compared to Khachaturian's violin concerto, Babajanian's work was often seen as derivative (Amatuni, 1985; Harutyunian, 2021). However, Babajanian's concerto broke from tradition with its innovative form and expressive lyricism, reflecting his quest for





a distinct compositional voice (Hakobyan, 2013; Mirzoyan, 2005). The concerto's originality and cultural significance warrant a deeper appreciation today.

1.1 Research Background

Contemporary interpretations of classical music are crucial for keeping the genre vibrant and relevant to modern audiences. These interpretations allow performers to express their artistic voices, engaging contemporary listeners through fresh perspectives (Rosen, 2000). By deeply analysing the score, considering its historical context, and drawing from personal experience, performers can infuse their interpretations with individuality. Experimenting with technique and incorporating interdisciplinary elements can further enhance audience engagement (Cook, 2013; Rosen, 2002; Taruskin, 1995). Nicholas Cook (2008) suggests that multiple meanings arise from juxtaposing works of similar nature, much like a film montage. Almen and Pearsall (2006) argue that interpretation is not solely the composer's domain but is also shaped by the active involvement of performers, who bring new or culturally influenced meanings to the music.

This study examines intertextual connections between Babajanian's violin concerto and selected works from the Armenian tradition and Western composers. The goal is to present a technically and artistically convincing interpretation by identifying and exploring these intertextual perspectives. By analysing Armenian musical traits such as rhythms and melodies, I explore how Babajanian integrates traditional





Armenian elements into his concerto, enhancing the understanding of his unique compositional style.

My research also delves into the influences of Armenian composers such as Komitas, Spendiaryan, and Khachaturian on Babajanian's work, and evaluates claims of his concerto's epigonic nature. These connections are key to delivering a meaningful and convincing performance.

The analysis of existing recordings of Babajanian's concerto is also crucial. Recording analysis provides insight into performers' interpretative approaches, shedding light on stylistic shifts and intertextual influences over time (Bayley, 2010; Kaminsky, 2016; Lerch et al., 2019). The focus of this research is on the auditory examination of cross-cultural elements such as intonation and ornamentation in recordings by Armenian violinist Villi Mokatsyan (1932–1997), Russian violinist Leonid Kogan (1924–1982), and Russian-Armenian violinist Haik Kazazyan (b. 1973). This comparison highlights how interpretations of tempo, articulation, and dynamics have evolved, offering valuable insights into performance traditions (Leech-Wilkinson, 2009; Kaminsky, 2016; Lerch et al., 2019).

1.2 Problem Statement

Numerous musical compositions that were produced during the period of Soviet governance went on to face challenges. Throughout the 20th century, compositions from the USSR were not isolated but rather experienced varying degrees of visibility





and reception globally (Taruskin, 1997). Several of these valuable works were disregarded or perhaps overlooked as a result of the political circumstances and transformations that the country experienced. Composers from Russia and its Soviet republics, including Armenia, experienced marginalisation of their works due to Soviet cultural hierarchy and broader geopolitical issues that hindered the acknowledgement of their compositions (Frolova-Walker, 2007; Taruskin, 1997). Due to these circumstances, Babajanian's concerto, composed in 1948 amidst a period of political repression, has become less familiar to contemporary artists.

The limited accessibility of the score and the rarity of commercial recordings have greatly contributed to the relative obscurity of Babajanian's Concerto in A Minor. Due to its artistic excellence, however, it is essential to establish and conserve a performing tradition for this particular piece.

Little musicological study explicitly addresses violin concertos by Armenian composers (Hakobyan, 2013; Melikyan, 2020). While broad information on Babajanian's work is available, in-depth analyses—especially concerning his violin concerto—are few and often hard to access. A substantial amount of the existing literature is written in Russian and Armenian and is not extensively digitised. Although digital technologies such as Google Translate and AI platforms such as ChatGPT have made translation more accessible, difficulties persist in accurately deciphering intricate musicological terminology and context. Works including Hayk Hakobyan's "Violin Concertos of Armenian Composers of the Second Half of the 20th Century" (2014) and "Concerto for Violin and Symphonic Orchestra by Arno Babajanian: Peculiarity of Interpretation" (2013) offer significant insights; however, research from an intertextual





perspective remains predominantly unexamined. This work enhances the academic discourse on Babajanian's concerto by translating and critically analysing non-English sources.

Although Babajanian wrote several instrumental compositions, including two concertos for piano, cello, and violin; three string quartets; and a piano trio, he gained wider popularity as a composer of more than 200 popular songs. Additionally, Babajanian only wrote two pieces for solo violin: the Concerto in A Minor and the Sonata for Violin and Piano. This, too, might have indirectly contributed to the concertos' obscurity and lack of research.

The story of how numerous Soviet-era musical compositions have faced challenges ultimately highlights the complexity of this intertwining of political circumstances and historical developments. Babajanian's concerto, dating back to a time of political repression in 1948, continues to go unnoticed, by the complexity of score accessibility and the paucity of commercially issued recordings. Moreover, insufficient attention is paid to studies of musicological endeavours dedicated to Armenian violin concertos and Babajanian's works, complicating the understanding and appreciation of musical heritage. Babajanian's instrumental works have been largely overshadowed by his broad popularity as a composer of popular songs, but it is essential to realize that works like the Concerto in A minor deserve to be cherished and studied. In the future, making academic papers in Russian and Armenian more accessible and translating them into English will play a vital role in promoting a better understanding of Babajanian's musical heritage and securing a future for his less-known works.





1.3 Objectives and Questions

The performance objectives of this research are:

1. To identify and analyze intertextual references within Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A minor.
2. To examine how these references can guide performance decisions in contemporary interpretation.
3. To perform the intertextual references in Arno Babajanian Violin Concerto in A minor.

The proposed topic of this creative work dissertation is an investigation of a lesser-known violin concerto by Armenian composer Arno Babajanian. In order to achieve a convincing performance and popularise this work simultaneously, this creative work dissertation attempts to establish the presence of intertextual links in the concerto with Armenian folk music and a number of selected works by Armenian and Western composers.

The approaches employed to address inquiries, with the potential to contribute to the exploration of Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor, investigated how the composition emulated the works of various composers and incorporated Armenian vocal and instrumental traits. The study also extracted insights from performing styles, melodic or rhythmic patterns, folk tunes, and improvisational principles, and improvisational principles present in the concerto, which itself avoids direct imitation of specific genres or idioms.





In order to achieve the objectives of this research, the related research questions are:

1. What are the intertextual links between Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor and other works explicitly connected to it?
2. How can these intertextual connections inform interpretative choices for contemporary performers?
3. In what ways can historically and culturally informed interpretation contribute to the revitalisation of lesser-known works such as Babajanian's violin concerto?

This research poses two fundamental inquiries aiming to better understand Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor and its relevance. It first examines the interconnections between Babajanian's concerto and other musical works. By analysing these connections, the aim is to uncover the shared themes, motifs, and styles that may exist between Babajanian's composition and others, thereby enhancing comprehension of the influences that shaped his work. Furthermore, the research explores the impact of these links on present-day performers. It seeks to enhance contemporary performers' interpretation and revitalisation of Babajanian's concerto by exploring its interrelations with other compositions. This examination is intended to enhance an understanding and appreciation of Babajanian's music and its place in the contemporary repertoire.





1.4 Definition of Terms

Intertextuality

The concept of intertextuality was first used in literature by Julia Kristeva in 1967 to refer to a sophisticated literary device that uses textual references within a text, reflecting the reference (Kristeva, 1967). Richard Miller and Jonathan Cape (1975) argued that the interpretation of the text lies within the recognition of embodied multiplicity. Ingrid Monson (1996) introduced the concept of “intermusicality” when considering the influence of social, cultural, and racial setups within interactive jazz improvisations. The term “anxiety of influence,” coined by Harold Bloom (1997), describes the ability of talented poets to rarefy the influence of predecessors in order to create a new, imaginative space, similarly observed in Kevin Korsyn’s (1991) intertextual approach to compositions as related events.

Quotation, allusion, parody, pastiche, adaptation, stylisation, and transformation are forms of intertextuality in music (Kostka et al., 2021). Quotations, by definition, are more direct since they involve taking verbatim material from other work(s), while allusions refer to previous works or musical styles and traditions in a somewhat less explicit manner. Whereas parody replicates or mocks specific styles or works, pastiches fuse different elements from various sources to create a new work. Adaptation adapts pre-existing material into other forms or genres, and stylisation copies the particular styles of other artists. A transformation changes or adapts existing motifs to form something different from the original yet still recognisable (Kostka et al., 2018). Music





composers and performers use intertextual components as tools to analyse previous works, comprehending its emotional substance, technical characteristics, and historical context. Subconscious musical discussions are also evident in musical works. A composer's creative output often has aspects of latent intertextuality, which refers to external influences such as stylistic characteristics and cultural aural components or educational traditions that impact creation without the composer's awareness.

David Beard and Kenneth Gloag (2016) understood intertextuality as an interconnection with the works of others, unconscious or deliberate, that brings new meaning to music. Hatten (1985) argues that just as any art we consume influences us in some small way, intertextuality applies to all sides involved in creation and interpretation. Early texts constrain and enrich this process, just as later texts might likewise influence the listener and/or interpreter of the music/performer. Hatten further warned of the limits of radical intertextuality when placing analytical interpretation at the centre. He suggests that intertextuality should be viewed in the context of style and strategy as “regulators of relevant intertextual relationships” (Hatten, 1985, p. 70).

Performance and Interpretation

A performance means playing the work live or through recorded media. Interpretation addresses the artistic choices made by the performer in realising the score. The research defines intertextual interpretation as a method which draws on historical, stylistic, or cultural references to influence musical performances.





In this dissertation, the terms “modern” and “contemporary” performance are used with specific distinctions. “Modern” refers to a historical period primarily associated with the early-to-mid-20th century, particularly in the context of music movements such as Modernism, which was characterised by a break from traditional forms and experimentation with new compositional techniques. In contrast, “contemporary” focuses on current ideas, methods, and practices. This term reflects a more present-day approach, emphasising the latest developments in performance, analysis, and interpretation. While the analysis of Babajanian’s Violin Concerto in A Minor is rooted in both historical modernist influences and current performance practices, “contemporary approach” reflects the primary focus on current interpretative and analytical frameworks applied to the work.



Musical performance goes beyond simple reproduction; it converts written

compositions into vibrant, expressive forms that elicit deep emotional reactions from listeners. The act of interpretation enables artists to imbue music with individual expression, making each performance distinctive and emotionally impactful (Meyer, 1957; Kramer, 2021a). Leavy (2015) observes that music’s dynamic essence manifests in a communal temporal space between artists and listeners, enabling many interpretations. Consequently, contemporary performances represent a collaboration between performers and spectators, with scores functioning as interactive narratives (Bakan, 2013).

Many influential papers argue for increased scrutiny of musical interpretation and the need to analyse performances within their historical context in a more refined manner. In his book *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (2013), Nicholas Cook





illustrates how music should be read and understood through its performance rather than just as a text; he emphasises that performance involves the nuanced art of telling details beyond musical texts. Richard Taruskin, in *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (1995), acknowledges the critical role of historical context in performance practice. The questions raised by Lydia Goehr in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (1992) relate to how the sense of music as performance supplanted its status as a fixed form. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson (2009) promotes using recorded performances to illuminate interpretative whims in “The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance”. Together, they suggest reconsidering how musical performances are discussed, calling for more attentive and layered ways of listening than have been typical in conventional interpretations.



performance analysis, the study defines key concepts like performance and interpretation as well as intertextual interpretation both theoretically and practically. 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. The study defines intertextual interpretation as an approach which uses external musical references across a range of historical, cultural, and stylistic dimensions to guide the performance. These concepts exist continuously through the interpretative process by actively shaping it instead of being treated as universally fixed principles. The intertextual approach to perceiving Babajanian’s violin concerto functions both as academic theory and as practical performance guidance that directs musicians to decide on phrasing and expressiveness. The dissertation explains cultural





meaning-specific terms which particularly affect Armenian musical traditions to enable performers to maintain consistency and interpretive clarity.

1.5 Programme for Recital 1

The first recital is designed to demonstrate intertextual links between Arno Babajanian's violin concerto and violin sonata and other popular violin concertos, including the music of Aram Khachaturian and Armenian folk tunes (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Programme for Recital 1

	Composer	Title	Movement	Time
1	Felix Mendelsohn	Violin Concerto in E Minor	First movement, <i>Allegro Molto Appassionato</i>	14 minutes
2	Arno Babajanian	Violin Sonata	First movement, <i>Grave</i>	11 minutes
3	Komitas (Arr. K. Dombaev)	Two pieces for violin and piano	<i>Keler-Tsoler</i> <i>Vagarshapat Dance</i>	7 minutes
4	Aram Khachaturian (Arr. for violin and piano by A.G. Smbatyan)	<i>Adagio</i>		5 minutes
5	Arno Babajanian	Violin Concerto in A Minor	First and second movements <i>Allegro</i> <i>Andante</i>	20 minutes



	Composer	Title	Movement	Time
6	A. Agajanov	<i>Miniature on Armenian Folk Song "Dear Shoger"</i>		4 minutes
Total time			60 minutes	

To create the required 60-minute performance that fully reflects and connects to the topic of this creative dissertation, I chose works that carry similarities in areas including structure, melody, harmony, and rhythm. The aim was to juxtapose the works of different composers and styles with the works of Arno Babajanian, allowing the audience to explore interconnections between the pieces. For instance, the first movement of Felix Mendelssohn's Concerto in E Minor was chosen to demonstrate a likeness to the first movement of Babajanian's concerto within the first measures.

Babajanian's concerto opens with a violin solo almost immediately after a series of minor thirds played by the orchestra and supported by short repetitive tonic-dominant-bass (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1

Babajanian, Violin Concerto in A Minor, first movement, mm 1–2



This is clearly reminiscent of the beginning of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E Minor, where the opening minor thirds of the strings are accompanied by a tonic-dominant accompaniment in the bass, as shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2

Mendelssohn, Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64, Allegro, measures 1–6

The musical score for Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64, measures 1–6, is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is the Violin Solo part, which begins with a melodic line starting on G4. The subsequent staves are for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Basses. The Violin I and II parts play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Viola, Violoncello, and Double Basses parts provide a tonic-dominant accompaniment in the bass, marked 'Pizz.' and 'p'. The tempo is marked 'Allegro, Molto Appassionato'.

Though the inclusion of Khachaturian's violin concerto in the recital would be relevant for the epigonic conjecture with Babajanian's violin concerto, I opted to include A. G. Smbatyan's transcription of the *Adagio* from the ballet *Spartacus* (1954). This was done for two reasons. First, Khachaturian's technically and musically challenging work was too monumental to be included in a one-hour programme. Second, the structural and harmonic affinity of the second movement in Babajanian's violin concerto to Khachaturian's *Adagio* is overt. The scales and passages of the second movement share modal and rhythmic similarities. Therefore, the performance of the *Adagio* is hoped to highlight the comparability of the melodic and rhythmic



development between the two works, establishing intertextual connections between the ballet music of Khachaturian and Babajanian's early work.

The next two pieces in the programme are Karp Dombaev's arrangements of Armenian melodies—*Keler-Tsoler* and *Vagarshapat Dance*—collected by Komitas,¹ a composer whose works significantly influenced other Armenian composers. Though Babajanian did not make the arrangements, he admitted admiring Komitas's works while conceptualising his arrangement of the *Vagarshapat Dance* tune for piano. The inclusion of *Miniature on the Armenian Folk Song "Dear Shoger"* by Artyom Agajanov (a tune first recorded by Komitas) in the recital programme seeks to draw attention to metre-rhythmic specifics of the Armenian song genre. These three works of contrasting characters aim to reveal the extensive influence of Armenian traditional tunes in Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor.

1.6 Programme for Recital 2

The final recital will comprise a full concerto and a violin sonata. Two parts of the 1.5-hour performance will be focused on the full violin sonata and concerto. This programme includes Babajanian's arrangement of the legendary *Nocturne*,² a purely instrumental piece. This will represent the song's legacy from the later period of Babajanian's life.

¹ Sometimes spelled Gomitas.

² This was the last piece Arno Babajanian ever composed. Only after his death was *Nocturne* arranged for vocals. Robert Rozhdestvensky, a poet and close friend of the composer, wrote lyrics to the piece, making it instantly popular.



This programme will include two pieces by Khachaturian as well. The song poem *In Honour of the Ashughs*, Op. 19, is a tribute to the art of the traditional singer-instrumentalists called ashughs, as a large part of Armenian heritage involves improvisation and spontaneity. The famous *Sabre Dance* from the ballet *Gayane* (1942) is contrasted with the third movement of Babajanian's violin concerto, revealing possible similarities in rhythmic figures and the fiery character of the music.

Table 1.2

Programme for Recital 2

	Composer	Title	Movement	Time
1	Arno Babajanian	Violin Concerto in A Minor	1. <i>Allegro</i> 2. <i>Andante</i> 3. <i>Allegro vivace</i>	33 minutes
2	Komitas	Two pieces for violin and piano (Arr. K. Dombaev)	<i>Keler-Tsoler</i> <i>Vagarshapat Dance</i>	7 minutes
3	Aram Khachaturian	<i>Song poem "In Honour of the Ashugs", Op. 19</i> <i>Sabre Dance</i> (Transc. Jascha Heifetz)		12 minutes
4	Agajanov	<i>Fantasia on Armenian Folk Song "Shoger-jan"</i>		5 minutes
5	Arno Babajanian	<i>Nocturne</i> (Arr. I. Granitski and E. Zobkov)		5 minutes



	Composer	Title	Movement	Time
6	Arno Babajanian	Violin Sonata	1. <i>Grave</i> 2. <i>Andante sostenuto</i> 3. <i>Allegro risoluto</i>	24 minutes
Total Time		1 hour 26 minutes		

1.7 Signification of Performance

A musical work achieves audience comprehension through the central role performance plays within it. Through phrasing and dynamic control and proper articulation skills, performers can interpret musical notes to generate fresh expressions that animate a score. For the performance of Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A Minor, the musician must integrate knowledge of Armenian folk musical elements and cultural history along with basic mastery of the piece. The active interpretation process forms a vivid connection which unites the composer's work with the performer, along with the audience members.

Music performance is determined through the combination of cultural heritage and training background which forms how musicians present essential musical concepts. The process of interpretation stems from composers' intended meanings combined with musicians' personal decision-making process, according to Cook (2008). The dissertation evaluates Babajanian's concerto through intertextual analysis and performance decisions in bringing out musical meaning by blending Armenian





cultural elements with classical Western approaches. This study offers a framework for creating culturally informed and artistically authentic interpretations of obscure works by integrating historical context, musical analysis and performer's insight.

