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Motivic Intertextuality and Embedded Intermusicality: Performer Agency in Babajanian's Violin Concerto First Movement

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Abstract This paper investigates intertextual strategies in the first movement (Allegro) of Arno Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A minor, a work that remains both underexplored and underperformed. Situated at the crossroads of Soviet concerto tradition and Armenian folk idiom, the study argues that Babajanian's intertextual voice emerges through structural, stylistic, and cultural references—centering on motivic development. It highlights how latent Armenian modal gestures are embedded within motivic cells, which become dynamic sites of musical dialogue through performer-led interpretation. Focusing on motivic transformation, the article adopts a practice-led framework and performance-led analysis to show how these small cells are continually reshaped, conveying unity, emotional nuance, and expressive depth. In doing so, it reveals how Armenian musical memory and Soviet-era formal strategies converge, offering performers a culturally grounded approach to interpretation and contributing to a broader re-evaluation of Soviet repertoire.

Keywords Intertextuality, Motivic Development, Armenian Tradition, Embedded Intermusicality, Practice-Led Research, Contemporary Performance

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1. Tracing the Voice Within the Voice

Arno Babajanian's (1921–1983) Violin Concerto in A minor (1948) remains understudied and rarely performed, despite occupying a unique space between Soviet-Armenian identity and Western classical tradition (Amatuni, 1985; Hakobyan, 2013). This paper examines how folk-derived motivic cells, shaped by Armenian modal and rhythmic intricacies, create structural coherence and emotional depth, blending cultural memory with individual expression in the concerto's first movement (Allegro). Although the article focuses specifically on motivic transformation within this movement, Babajanian's intertextual voice also manifests through broader structural, stylistic, and cultural allusions that merit further investigation beyond the current scope.

This study adopts a practice-led research framework in which musical performance acts as both a site and source of knowledge (Cook, 1999; Rink, 2002; Doğan-Dack, 2012). Within this broader framework, it employs performance-led analysis as its primary methodological tool—analyzing how interpretive decisions made in the act of performance (e.g., bowing, articulation, phrasing, vibrato, microtonal nuance) illuminate the expressive logic of the score and the cultural significance of its motivic transformations. This approach privileges transformation over fixed thematic borrowing (Musaeva, 2025).

Embedded Intermusicality, as proposed here, describes the subtle coexistence and interaction of musical references within Babajanian's score. These are evident not only in quotations or stylistic traits but also in modal gestures, rhythmic nuances, and motivic transformations. This concept highlights how layers of cultural memory and musical language are encoded by the composer and revealed through performance. The concerto becomes a space where Armenian folk idioms and Western compositional techniques interact, with motivic transformation realized not only in the writing but through the performer's interpretive decisions, as explored in Section 5.

By integrating score analysis with embodied performance, this research positions the performer as a co-creator of meaning. The work emerges as a living archive of cultural memory, demanding a nuanced interpretation of its rhythmic elasticity and modal ornamentation. This approach not only revitalizes an overlooked repertoire but also offers a performer-centered method for engaging with Soviet-era music, grounded in the recognition of Embedded Intermusicality as a key to interpretation.

2. Cultural Memory in Context

Arno Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A minor is deeply rooted in Armenian cultural memory while also reflecting the dominant musical styles and aesthetic ideals of the mid-twentieth-century Soviet Union (Frolova-Walker, 1998; Avdalyan, 2011; Poghosyan, 2025). Unlike composers who signal national identity through direct folk quotations or stylized pastiche, Babajanian constructs his musical language from within, employing motivic processes rooted in Armenian modal practice (Amatuni, 1985; Melikyan, 2020). This introspective compositional method fosters a nuanced intertextuality that is structural, developmental, and embedded within the concerto's musical fabric.

Here, 'cultural memory' refers to the use of motivic cells typical of Armenian folk and sacred genres as evocative fragments imbued with historical and expressive resonance (Hovhannisyan, 2023; Komitas et al., 1998; Nercessian, 2000, 2001). These cells are not quotations but carriers of cultural significance. They align with broader concepts of musical intertextuality as a continuum of stylistic and cultural references, adapted here to a musical grammar in which memory is inscribed motivically and modally (Metzer, 2003; Klein, 2005).

The concerto reflects microtonal inflections and ornamented phrasing rooted in oral performance traditions (Bodurian & Dragulin, 2020; Hovhannisyan, 2023; Pashinyan, 1973). The Armenian lullaby (Figure 1) exemplifies these microtonal melodic gestures characteristic of the Armenian song tradition. Though transcribed within the constraints of the Western notation system, its embellished phrasing—anchored on a primary tone and traversing semitones—suggests microtonal subtleties typical of oral performance.



Figure 1: A simple motif illustrating alternating semitone/whole-tone motion and ornamental phrasing in an Armenian lullaby (Atayan, 1965).

Babajanian abstracts idiomatic features—such as augmented seconds, minor thirds, and oscillations between semitone and whole-tone motion—into motivic cells (Amatuni, 1985). These retain the expressive tension and modal ambiguity of their folk origins, becoming generative materials for development throughout the concerto. As illustrated in Figure 2, the primary cell is introduced in measure 3 of the Allegro.



Figure 2. A motivic cell abstracted by Babajanian, demonstrating alternating semitone and whole-tone motion, central pitch focus, and ornamental potential.

Some scholars have criticized Babajanian for epigonism, suggesting his style echoes Khachaturian without sufficient innovation (Harutyunyan & Elbakyan, 2021). At first glance, his approach may resemble Khachaturian's use of folk stylization, especially through identifiable melodies from Armenian, Georgian, and Azerbaijani traditions (Davidjants, 2017; Kushner, 2018; Poghosyan, 2025; Schultz, 2016). However, while not formally innovative by Soviet standards, Babajanian's concerto exemplifies meticulous motivic construction where Western developmental logic interweaves with Armenian expressive nuance (Amatuni, 1985; Kushnarev, 1958; Melikyan, 2020; Vann, 2015).

Rather than quoting folk melodies directly, Babajanian distills Armenian modal and melodic contours into tightly organized motivic units—oscillating patterns, neighboring-tone figures, and rhythmically flexible phrases. Their referential power lies in their stylistic affinity with Armenian monody and with expressive idioms of instruments like the duduk, zurna, and kanon (Amatuni, 1985; Nercessian, 2001).

These motivic devices serve both structural and cultural functions. Their layered meaning reflects how musical memory operates through embedded stylistic references and motivic continuity, enabling a connection to cultural identity that is both imaginative and structurally encoded. Similarly, Joseph Straus's (2006) idea of transformational hearing frames motivic development as identity maintained through variation rather than repetition, while Robert Hatten's (2004) concept of expressive transformation explains how motives accrue new meanings through structural change. Babajanian also draws on serialist techniques—not through strict twelve-tone practice, but via the systematic deployment and transformation of motivic cells—imbuing the concerto with modernist internal architecture (Amatuni, 1985). These evolving motifs maintain expressive identity while adapting to new emotional contexts, enabling interpretive openness in which meaning arises through relationships among sound, memory, and listener engagement (Cook, 2013; Kramer, 2001).



Figure 3: Motivic evolution of the cell introduced in the Allegro's first theme (mm. 40-49)

This evolving motivic landscape underscores that Babajanian's thematic material is not merely constructed but experienced—its meaning shaped by transformation over time and through performance. Eric Clarke's (2005) ecological model reminds us that such meanings are embodied—shaped by culturally conditioned perception and performer interpretation. Babajanian's intertextual voice emerges through a network of transformations that are simultaneously structural, affective, and culturally grounded.

This dynamic interplay between memory and invention positions the concerto as a dialogic text between past and present, tradition and transformation. Babajanian reimagines folk idioms within a Western formal language. His voice is Armenian not through citation, but through motivic logic—a structure imbued with cultural inflection.

Understanding the expressive potential of these motivic cells requires more than formal analysis; it necessitates a practice-oriented approach. Performers animate the score's latent meanings through articulation, dynamics, pitch

nuance, tempo, and tone color (Carr et al., 2023; Cook, 2012; Dreyfus, 2022; Galamian, 2013; Rink, 2002). A microtonal pitch bend, a strategically placed emphasis, rubato, embellishment intensity, or bowing nuance can evoke meaning beyond the notation—making performance an act of embodied analysis.

Babajanian's abstracted folk elements articulate Armenian identity from within the music's structure. This challenges reductive views of Soviet music as either conformist or oppositional (Frolova-Walker, 1998; Goldman, 2019; Taruskin, 2009), suggesting instead that identity is forged through composition, performance, and reception. Interpretation reveals how the concerto simultaneously preserves and transforms its cultural lineage.

3. Tracing Meaning in Motion: Practice-Led Methodology in Context

This study employs a practice-led methodology that positions the performer as an active interpretive agent rather than a passive conduit of the composer's intentions. Historically, musicological discourse has privileged the composer's voice, often marginalizing the performer's interpretive contributions, particularly in discussions of intertextuality. By foregrounding the performer's role, this study contributes to a growing body of research that reconsiders how performers participate in the construction of musical meaning.

While practice-led research frames performance as a mode of inquiry generating new knowledge, a performance-led perspective further foregrounds performance itself as the site where intertextual meaning is realized, transformed, and communicated.

Intertextuality is conventionally understood as the enrichment of a text through references, quotations, or stylistic allusions. Traditionally applied to written compositions, this concept has centered on the composer as the primary source of intertextual meaning, with the score and its author viewed as the primary vehicles of artistic intention. The performer, by contrast, has often been relegated to a secondary role. However, this view is increasingly contested. Recent scholarship recognizes that performers do not simply reproduce musical texts but actively re-create them, drawing on intertextual influences such as stylistic conventions, cultural practices, and personal histories (Cook, 2018; Kostka, 2018; Kramer, 2021; Rink et al., 2017). Performance thus becomes a site where intertextuality is enacted and transformed—where layers of meaning unfold through interpretive agency and evolving artistic circumstances.

This study draws on several theoretical frameworks to propose the concept of *Embedded Intermusicality*, which expands the notion of motivic cells, modal gestures, and rhythmic inflections as carriers of stylistic and cultural memory. While these musical elements are crucial, Embedded Intermusicality also encompasses more implicit layers of cultural dialogue encoded in the music's structure and style. Cook (2013) views the performer as a co-creator who reveals meanings beyond the score; Frith (1996) emphasizes the dynamic interaction between music, culture, and identity; Klein (2005) explores intertextuality as a form of musical dialogue; and Born (2005) and Taruskin (2006, 2009) underline music's embeddedness within historical and socio-political contexts. Collectively, these perspectives support a view of motivic transformation as an interpretive process in which performer intuition unveils a complex relationship among stylistic and cultural associations.

The notion of Embedded Intermusicality describes the subtle, often implicit ways in which motivic cells, modal gestures, and rhythmic inflections serve as vessels for cultural memory. These elements may not be immediately evident in the notated score but emerge through the performer's interpretive process during rehearsal and performance. Drawing on intuitive knowledge and culturally informed practices, the performer shapes the interpretation from within. This approach reconceptualizes the relationship between score and performer as dialogic and exploratory rather than hierarchical or unidirectional, allowing latent intermusical references to be realized through embodied performance.

Shafiei's (2018) conception of the performer as an intertextual reader provides a compelling model for understanding how interpretive decisions arise from a matrix of influences. Performers do not simply imitate their sources; they rework and reinterpret material in ways that reflect interpretive agency and personal identity (Doğantan-Dack, 2012; Cook, 2013; Born, 2005). Interpretive assessments are thus shaped by complex layers of historical and performative influence, including creative misreadings and reappropriations.

Culturally rooted performance practices are central to expressive intention. In Armenian music, tetrachordal modal structures provide the scalar framework characteristic of the tradition, while ornamental figures and modal inflections function as expressive idioms realized through performance (Avdalyan, 2011; Davidjants, 2015; Ohanian, 2025). Such elements act as interpretive cues and enrich the performer's understanding of stylistic nuance (Avdalyan, 2011; Davidjants, 2015; Tumayan, 2016). Moreover, personal memory and emotional resonance—particularly in music carrying national or collective identity—play a significant role in shaping interpretation (Aleskerli, 2023; Shafiei, 2018; Clarke, 2005). Babajanian's motivic language—marked by neighboring motion, modal ambiguity, and asymmetrical rhythmic patterns—provides fertile ground for intertextual engagement. Drawing on Kushnarev's (1958) notion of "melodic rehash," this study tracks how recurring motifs—hereafter referred to as a motivic cell—undergo transformations in rhythm, harmony, and register across the movement. Each recurrence invites new expressive responses, shaped by changing mood, narrative context, and structural awareness.

These transformations are not solely technical—they are also emotional. A previously lyrical theme may return in a more declamatory character, its affective color reshaped by modal shifts or rhythmic displacement. Rather than repeating ideas verbatim, Babajanian recontextualizes them, allowing performers to encounter them anew each time. The performer navigates this evolving terrain not through mimicry, but through intuition, memory, and structural analogy.

In this framework, performance becomes a dynamic process of meaning-making. Musical ideas function as evolving signifiers of cultural and personal memory, reinterpreted through the performer's historically and culturally informed perspective. The performer thus becomes both a preserver and innovator, articulating the music's expressive potential through lived experience.

4. Motivic Development across Movement

At the core of the Allegro in Arno Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A minor lies a tightly organized network of motivic cells that function as carriers of cultural memory and structural coherence. These small, recurring melodic fragments evoke a layered intertextual narrative embedded within the concerto's architecture. As signifiers of Armenian folk idioms refracted through Babajanian's compositional language, they weave together personal, collective, and historical voices (Amatuni, 1985; Hakobyan, 2013; Komitas et al., 1998). This section identifies the principal motivic cell and two of its key transformational techniques—permutation, augmentation, and metric displacement—to demonstrate how Babajanian's intertextual voice operates through compact and adaptable material.

4.1 The Opening Cell: Gesture as Seed

At the beginning of the violin entry of the Violin Concerto, Babajanian introduces a compact motivic unit that drives thematic development of the first movement. This technique recalls Bohuslav Martinů's use of "cell technique" (Wang, 2025). In both composers' work¹, such cells are not merely thematic fragments but foundational elements that shape the musical structure through processes like augmentation, fragmentation, and permutation. For Babajanian, however, this cellular approach is filtered through Armenian melodic traditions.

The concerto opens with an orchestral statement in A minor, introducing the motivic cell in a descending stepwise figure (A-B-G#-A) in the violin part marked by implied asymmetrical accentuation and modal ambiguity in measures 3-7 (Figure 4).

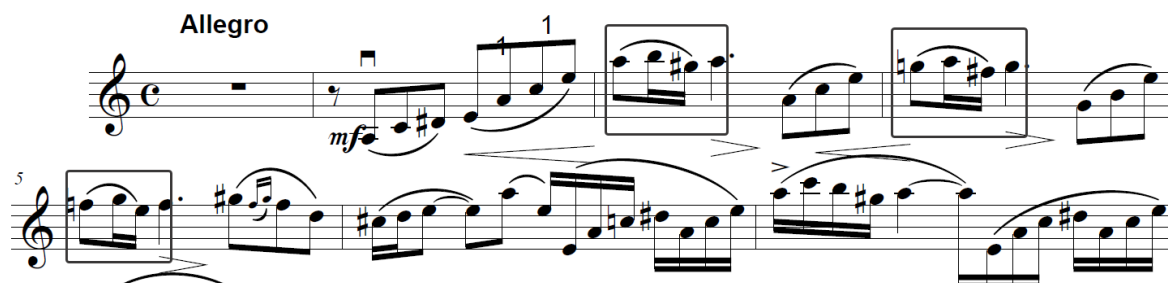


Figure 4: First iteration of the motivic cell in the violin part in Allegro (mm 1-7) descending stepwise.

The stepwise contour and asymmetry evoke Armenian folk idioms (Kushnarev, 1958; Nettl, 2005; Ohanian, 2025), particularly those found in ashugh traditions, where melodies orbit a central tone before expanding outward. This is exemplified in Figure 5, which presents a motif from Sayat-Nova's *Me khosq unim* ("I Have a Word to Say").

¹ While this article does not explore direct lines of influence, Babajanian's use of compact motivic cells shows notable parallels with Martinů's cell technique, particularly in the way small units generate structural and expressive coherence.

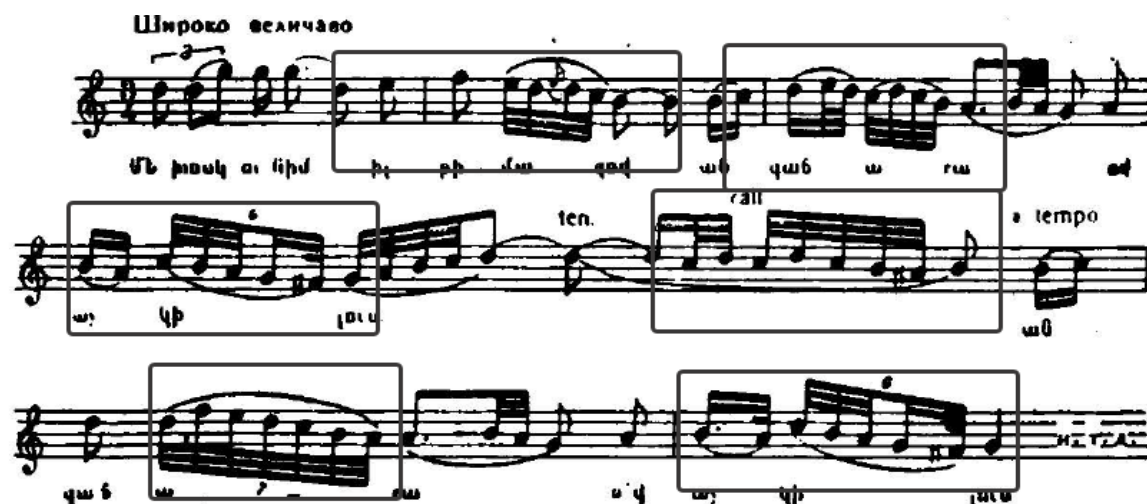


Figure 5: Sayat-Nova's *Me khosq unim* (transcribed in Atayan, 1965, p. 59) demonstrates central-tone hovering in asymmetrical, stepwise motion typical of ashugh melodic style.

The initial cell undergoes continual transformation. Early in the movement, it appears in rhythmically augmented, expanded, and permuted form within the second half of the main theme.

(Figure 6).



Figure 6: Rhythmically augmented, expanded, and permuted form of initial cell in mm 7-9.

In the lyrical second theme (mm. 78-85), it is embedded in broader arches (Figure 7). Rather than disrupting the steady beat, this displacement subtly alters the motif's rhythmic character, enriching its expressive impact.

The musical score for Figure 7 consists of three systems. The first system features a Violin part with a 'Sul G' instruction and a 'Meno mosso' tempo marking. A box highlights a specific motivic cell in the Violin line. The second system shows the Piano accompaniment with dynamics 'ppp' and 'pp', and the Clarinet solo part. The third system continues the development of the motivic cell across the Violin, Piano, and Clarinet parts, with various musical notations like slurs, ties, and articulation marks.

Figure 7: Motivic cell embedded in the lyrical second theme (mm. 66-78), showing expressive expansion while preserving core identity.

4.2 Permutation and Augmentation: Expanding the Motivic Language

Babajanian's motivic cells are not static. In the main theme, the core motivic cell is echoed, permuted, and extended outward as A-C-B-G#-A in mm. 7-9, initiating a tightly woven motivic discourse (Figure 8).

The musical score for Figure 8 shows two systems. The first system features a Violin part with a box highlighting a specific motivic cell. The second system shows the Piano accompaniment, which echoes and extends the motivic cell from the Violin part. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and articulation marks.

Figure 8: Motivic cell is echoed, extended outward, and reassembled at mm. 7-9.

The restatement is strongly articulated in the violin part between the first and second presentations of the theme in the orchestral accompaniment (mm. 25-31), generating declamatory intensity. Tension escalates further as the thematic material overlaps (m. 29) or fragments into staggered entries (m. 30), evoking introspection and emotional depth (Figure 9).

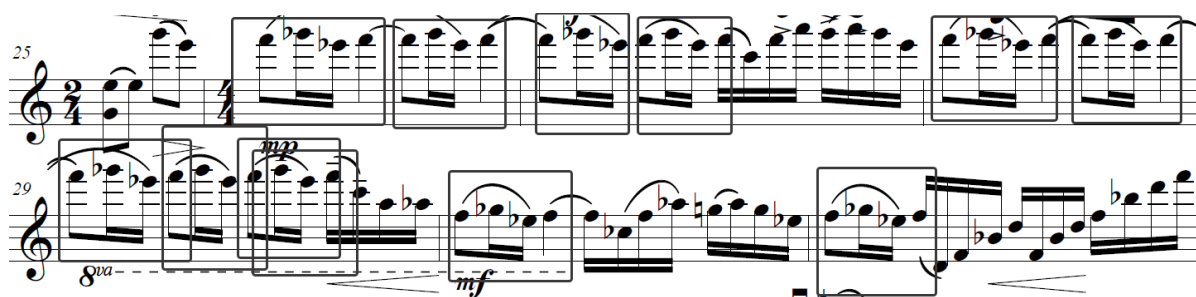


Figure 9: The thematic material overlaps (m. 29) or fragments into spaced entries (m. 30), evoking introspection and heightened emotional depth.

This passage recalls the Armenian folk song *Garun a dzun a arel* ("It's Spring, But Snowing"), as transcribed by [Atayan \(1965, p. 15\)](#), where motivic restatement is employed with striking clarity (Figure 10). The parallel illustrates how Babajanian's motivic cell resonates with deep-rooted folk archetypes, reinforcing cultural memory.



Figure 10: Motivic resemblance between Babajanian's theme development strategy and the Armenian folk song *Garun a dzun a arel* (It's Spring, But Snowing), transcribed by [Atayan \(1965, p. 15\)](#), highlighting descending contour and rhythmic asymmetry.

In the second half of the main theme (mm. 44–47), the original cell is rhythmically augmented and permuted. The descending motion and mordent highlight its core shape, lending it rhetorical weight (Figure 11).

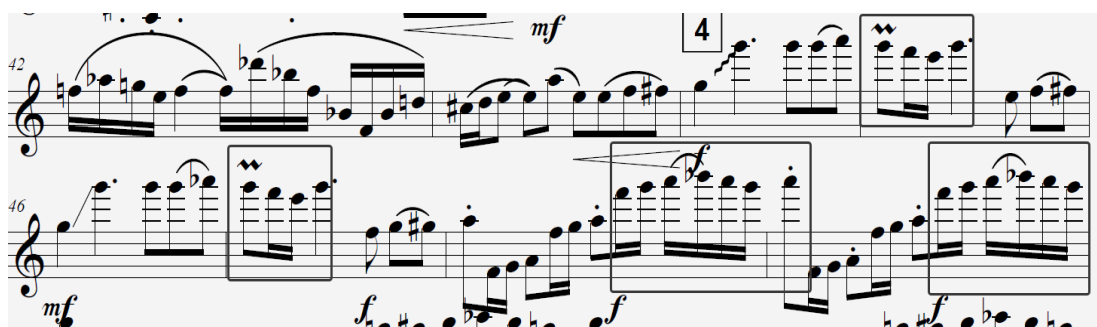


Figure 11: Rhythmically augmented form of the original motivic cell in the exposition's second half of the main theme, illustrating ongoing transformation (mm. 44-45, 46-47 & 48-49).

The glissando in m. 45 and the mordent in m. 44 reinforce connections with ashugh instrumental traditions, where ornamentation is prevalent. These embellishments enhance expressive nuance and contribute to structural cohesion by expanding the motivic language.

Just before the development section (mm. 95–104), the augmented motivic cell is further expanded with elongated note values and broader intervals, including augmented thirds in the orchestral part (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Augmented motivic cell before development (mm. 97-99), featuring elongated note values and augmented thirds in the orchestral part.

This treatment contrasts with the more assertive presentation in the exposition, highlighting the motif's versatility. The mm. 105-106 of the development section (Figure 13) is an intensification of the initial motivic cell transformation, underscoring its structural importance while accommodating the changing musical situation with following virtuoso passages in the violin part.



Figure 13: Orchestral repetition of the motivic cell with rhythmic variation (mm. 105-106), underpinning structural continuity.

Throughout the development section, Babajanian transforms the motivic cell through restatement, modal inflection, and expressive variation of its original rhythmic identity (Figure 14). These alterations amplify the dramatic tension and expand the cell's emotional and structural role within the movement.



Figure 14: Modal inflections of the motivic seed in the violin part (mm. 124-126), demonstrating expressive intensification through pitch and rhythm.

Having examined the opening cell and its augmentation, I now turn to Babajanian's use of metric displacement as a key technique in motivic transformation.

4.3 Metric Displacement: Shifting Accentual Space

Another key technique in Babajanian's motivic development is metric displacement. Motives are frequently offset from the metrical grid, generating syncopated or irregular patterns that blur formal boundaries and heighten tension in transitional and developmental sections. In the second theme, the motivic seed first appears unconventionally in D \flat major and is transformed into a figure of triplet semiquavers tied to a crotchet (Figure 15), creating a syncopated effect.

Figure 15: Metric displacement of the motivic seed in D \flat major, generating syncopated tension in the second theme (mm. 68 & 70).

This results in rhythmic elasticity akin to the expressive asymmetries in the rhythmic contour of the song *Antuni* (Komitas, 1960, p. 28), illustrating traditional source of Babajanian's syncopated transformation (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Expressive asymmetries in rhythmic contour of song *Antuni* (Komitas, 1960, p. 28).

In measures 68 & 70, Babajanian shifts emphasis to the second measure of each phrase, displacing the motivic material from its expected position on the downbeat. Such displacement also opens space for interpretive flexibility in performance, requiring sensitivity to the implied (rather than notated) pulse. Anchored to a sustained central tone, metric displacement continues in the following F \sharp minor episode of the second theme, just before the development section (Figure 17).



Figure 17: Triplet-based transformation of the motivic cell in F# minor with sustained central tone, shows increased rhythmic density and expressive contrast preceding the development

The development section intensifies Babajanian's use of metric displacement in mm. 118–122, where the motivic cell is rhythmically reshaped and repositioned within the orchestral texture. As shown in Figure 18, the motivic cell begins on a weak beat, while its central tone is emphasized on the strong downbeat, subtly altering its relationship to the metrical framework.



Figure 18: The motivic cell begins on a weak beat in the orchestra part (mm 118-122), altering its relationship to the metrical framework.

Rather than destabilizing the pulse, this shift reinterprets the motif's rhythmic identity, enriching its expressive character. Such displacement echoes the asymmetrical phrasing typical of Armenian folk idioms, where accentuation often resists regular metric alignment.

A notable moment of motivic dialogue occurs starting in measure 127, where the orchestra introduces a triplet-based call that interacts with the violin's response, which echoes the original motivic cell and vice versa (Figure 19).



This exchange establishes a layered interplay between rhythmic transformation and motivic continuity, highlighting Babajanian's ability to generate expressive tension through rhythmic contrast while preserving thematic cohesion.

The orchestral interlude in mm. 174-179 serves as a culmination of the motivic and rhythmic transformations explored throughout the movement, dramatically preparing the arrival of the solo cadenza. In this passage, Babajanian layers octave-spaced triplet semiquavers in the brass—functioning as a forceful rhythmic call—against higher woodwinds' responses articulated in triplet quavers. This call-and-response texture intensifies the forward momentum and echoes earlier motivic gestures, now distilled into rhythmically charged fragments (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Call-and-response texture in mm.174-179 intensifies the forward momentum and echoes earlier motivic gestures.

The contrasting rhythmic densities and registral spacing heighten the tension, while the motivic coherence sustains structural unity. The passage functions both as a climactic rhetorical gesture and a transitional mechanism that bridges the developmental section with the soloist's moment of expressive freedom in the cadenza.

The motivic development of the cadenza is primarily built on cells derived from the rhythmical gesture of the first theme, employing techniques such as augmentation and modal inflection (Figure 21).



Figure 21: Mm. 6-9 of Allegro's Cadenza demonstrate cells derived from the rhythmical gesture of the first theme, employing techniques such as augmentation and modal inflection.

In the recapitulation of the first theme (mm. 200–281), the motif reappears with restored metric stability, providing resolution and reinforcing the movement's structural coherence. The second theme, now in A major, features an interplay of triplet rhythms and a variant of the motivic cell. In the orchestra, a figure of four semiquavers—with the last tied to a long tone—appears in measures 237 and 243 (Figure 22), while the violin responds with a triplet rhythm derived from the second theme.

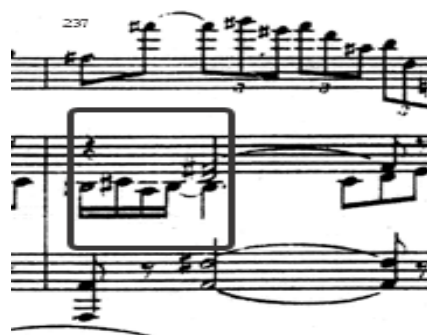
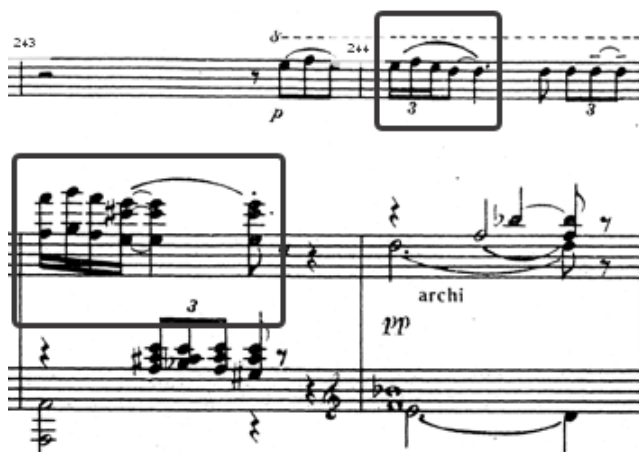


Figure 22: Motivic interplay in recapitulation: the orchestra presents a tied semiquaver variant (mm. 237 & 243), while the violin responds with a triplet rhythm originated from the second theme.



The motivic processes traced throughout the Allegro demand not only analytical attention but also interpretive sensitivity. As these transformations unfold, they call upon the performer's intuition to animate their expressive potential.

5. Interpretation and the Performer's Intuition

While the preceding analysis has traced the motivic cells shaping the structural and intertextual fabric of Babajanian's concerto, this alone does not account for its expressive realization. Motivic coherence and cultural memory are not solely embedded in the score; they are activated through the performer's interpretive engagement. This section shifts the focus from compositional construction to performative intuition, examining how interpretation animates the concerto's latent expressive and cultural meanings. Through this embodied dialogue with the score, the performer becomes a co-creator of intertextual resonance.

This is particularly evident in the performer's handling of phrasing, vibrato, and bow distribution, which animate the modal inflections and bring out their Armenian character. Such interpretive acts are not decorative but central to understanding the expressive trajectory of the music.

As [Beard and Gloag \(2004\)](#), [Cook \(2013\)](#), and [Rink et al. \(2017\)](#) emphasize, interpretation is a creative, context-sensitive act that transforms notation into expressive sound; it transforms notation into meaningful sound through artistic discernment. This process is especially vital in works where expressive nuances are implied rather than prescribed.

Babajanian's Violin Concerto leaves significant expressive space, omitting instructions for modal inflections, glissandi, or microtonal colorations. Such omissions reflect Soviet performance norms, which favored standardization, but they also point to the expressive potential that can now be unlocked through informed, imaginative interpretation. These interpretive choices often emerge from rehearsal-based experimentation, a process that researchers such as [Cook \(2013\)](#), [Doğantan-Dack \(2012\)](#), and [Small \(1998\)](#) recognize as crucial to realizing culturally embedded performance practices.

Rehearsal serves as a site of intuitive discovery, where interpretive trial-and-error fosters alignment with the concerto's idioms. This mirrors my earlier study ([Musaeva, 2025](#)), which highlighted the performer's role as a cultural mediator bridging the written score and oral tradition through embodied practice. The performer thus reactivates cultural memory not through replication but through imaginative re-engagement.

The concerto's sparse dynamic markings further require performers to independently shape expressive nuances. Agogic accents, which are subtle shifts in timing and emphasis, are vital tools. For instance, in thematic exposition and development, performers may emphasize pivotal notes within motivic cells to clarify modal inflections and phrasing. Similarly, in the lyrical second theme, agogic shaping sustains the melodic tension and expressive continuity despite minimal dynamic guidance. These interpretive gestures infuse music with emotional depth and structural clarity.

This approach draws on the view of performance as a form of knowledge production ([Doğantan-Dack, 2012](#); [Cook, 2013](#)). By engaging the performer's embodied intuition and historically informed awareness, latent intermusical connections—what I term Embedded Intermusicality—emerge as interpretive possibilities. In this framework, interpretation becomes both analytical and cultural, bringing to life the dialogic relationship between Armenian folk idioms and Soviet-era modernism.

Throughout the first movement, the performer's interpretive agency animates motivic development through nuanced temporal shaping, articulation, and modal colorations. As [Cook \(2013\)](#) notes, interpretation is a creative act, while Rink's (2016) notion of dynamic unity emphasizes the fluid, evolving nature of performance. The concerto thus becomes not a fixed text but a living performance cycle shaped by the performer's intertextual insight and artistic voice.

In summary, interpretation is not supplemental but intrinsic to Babajanian's concerto. This work invites dialogue between the past and present, text and intuition, and tradition and innovation, positioning the performer as a vital co-creator in a continually renewing intertextual process.

6. Conclusion

This article has explored how Arno Babajanian's Violin Concerto in A minor encodes cultural memory through the intertextual deployment of motivic cells rooted in Armenian melodic idioms. By focusing on the motivic cells and modal turn gesture, the analysis has demonstrated how these cells serve as evolving expressive and structural elements across the first movement. Rather than functioning as static quotations or nostalgic evocations, these motifs are reconfigured through metric displacement, rhythmic variation, and modal inflection—transformative techniques that reflect an internalized cultural logic rather than a mere pastiche of folkloric material.

This study draws on the performer-as-reader concept as a theoretical basis for its practice-led methodology. It places interpretive agency with the performer and shows how informed intuition can reveal layers of meaning in the score. Motivic development becomes not only musical invention but also interpretive remembering, where performance activates latent cultural resonances.

In contrast to earlier models of intertextuality that prioritize composer intention or text-based analysis, this article has shown that a performance-led perspective reveals how interpretive choices themselves shape the perceived meaning and expressive trajectory of the work. Babajanian's motivic cells are thus not only compositional devices but intertextual agents—sites where personal, historical, and cultural voices converge.

By proposing the concept of embedded intermusicality, this study contributes to both performance studies and Soviet-Armenian music scholarship. While practice-led research frames performance as a mode of inquiry generating new knowledge, a performance-led perspective further foregrounds performance itself as the site where intertextual meaning is realized, transformed, and communicated. It offers a practice-led model for analyzing how cultural memory is not only encoded in compositional detail but reactivated through performance. By drawing attention to Babajanian's concerto as a work rich in cultural meaning but rarely performed, this study calls for a deeper understanding of intertextuality—not just as something found in the written score or intended by the composer, but as something that comes alive through interpretation and embodied performance.

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