

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Learn more about the artists in  
Black Violin.

## WIL B

Wil B 'Simply Sick' (at left, above) attended Dillard High School of Performing Arts, and attempted to join the school band in an effort to play the saxophone. At age 13, he was mistakenly put into the string program instead of the band; as luck would have it, he mastered the viola and grew to love it.

He attended Florida State University. Not only is this young man talented on the violin but he also can sing, play the piano, drums, trumpet and the bass guitar. His influences include well known musical artists such as Stevie Wonder, George Benson, Curtis Mayfield, Chaka Khan, Victor Wooten, Common, AZ, Jill Scott, and Talib Kweli.

## KEV MARCUS

The second master of this unique duo, Kev Marcus (at right, above) also attended Dillard High School of Performing Arts. He was encouraged by his mother and teachers at the age of nine to begin playing the violin. From there he grew so intrigued by it that he couldn't let it go.

He went to college at Florida International University, where he met their manager Sam G. His musical artist influences are past great pioneers of the music world such as Herbie Hancock, Stuff Smith, Mozart, Bach, Brahms, and Nat King Cole. Kev Marcus also has been influenced by some of today's artists such as Mos Def, Notorious BIG, Dr. Dre, The Roots, Nas, and Jay-Z.

## ABOUT THE NAME

The name 'Black Violin' is derived from the influence of a famous Jazz violinist, Stuff Smith, who changed Wil B and Kev Marcus' perspectives on what the violin is really capable of. Six months before Smith's death, he recorded his most soulful solo album entitled *Black Violin*. His life's work was so moving that the duo decided to name their group after the most inspiring violinist they had ever heard.

## Did you know?

Black Violin has been given an Award by the Brooklyn Center for Performing Arts for their Outstanding Contributions to Middle & High School Performing Arts Students.

# MUSICAL INFLUENCES



Music is a powerful social force in our world. It has the ability to provoke emotion, share opinions and viewpoints, and offer an outlet for self-expression. During the performance, pay attention to your feelings and thoughts— are you inspired? Is this genre of music something that you have heard before? Try to sit back, keep an open mind, and really focus on the performance. If you are speechless, don't worry – music sometimes expresses ideas better than words do.

You do not need to know everything about a piece of music in order to enjoy it, however you may find you enjoy it even more if you know a bit about why it was composed and how it achieves its effect. Once you know what to listen for, you may even begin to enjoy types of music that previously did not interest you.

Explore some of the different musical styles that Black Violin draws on in their performances.

## HIP HOP

Since hip-hop emerged from the South Bronx in the 1970s, it has become an international, multi-billion-dollar phenomenon. It has grown to encompass more than just rap music—hip-hop has created a culture that incorporates ethnicity, art, politics, fashion, technology and urban life.

## JAZZ

Jazz emerged in the early 1900s when African American musicians combined European traditions with blues, ragtime, marching band music and other elements. During the 1920s many young Americans were disheartened by the destruction of World War I and began to challenge the old-fashioned attitudes of their parents. At the same time African Americans were migrating to northern cities like Chicago and New York and brought jazz and blues music with them. Jazz was one of the first styles of music to be played internationally over the radio directly into people's homes.

## CLASSICAL

The classical period was from around 1750 to 1830. Mozart and Haydn were famous composers from the Classical period. Today, one of the ways Merriam-Webster defines classical is “of, relating to, or being music in the educated European tradition that includes such forms as art song, chamber music, opera, and symphony.” There are six periods of classical music with stylistic differences.

- ◇ Before 1400 – Medieval  
*Characterized by Gregorian chant, mostly religious*
- ◇ 1400-1600 – Renaissance  
*Increase of secular music, madrigals, and art song*
- ◇ 1600-1750 – Baroque  
*Known for intricate ornamentation*
- ◇ 1750-1820 – Classical  
*Balance and structure*
- ◇ 1820-1900 – Romantic  
*Emotional, large, programmatic*
- ◇ Beyond 1900 – 20th Century  
*Limitless*

# VOCABULARY



**counterpoint:** two corresponding melodies are played at the same time

**DJ:** in hip-hop, a person who cuts and loops



beats to recreate music. They also pause, scratch, backspin, speed up or slow down, and or/delay the music. In its simplest form, cutting involves cutting a few bars of the beat and looping it to create a continuous sound.

**duet:** a piece of music written for two performers

**dynamics:** the loudness or softness of sound.

piano	<i>p</i>	soft
pianissimo	<i>pp</i>	very soft
mezzo piano	<i>mp</i>	slightly soft
forte	<i>f</i>	loud
fortissimo	<i>ff</i>	very loud
mezzo forte	<i>mf</i>	slightly loud

**fugue:** a composition tool in which one instrument plays a short melody, then another instrument echoes the pieces, then another echoes, with all parts interweaving into each other.

**improvise:** to compose or perform without previous preparation, to create in the spur of the moment

**influence:** the power to change or affect someone. Many musicians and styles influenced Black Violin's style.



Image: brianvellmure.com

**pitch:** the relative highness or lowness of a sound



**solo:** a piece of music written for a single voice of instrument

**tempo:** the speed or rate at which a piece of music is played

**violin:** a bowed instrument with four strings that is used to provide the soprano and alto parts in the string section of the modern orchestra and the string quartet. It is a highly valued instrument because of its remarkable acoustical properties and its versatility.

**viola:** the tenor of the modern violin family, with a range that extends a fifth below that of the violin and starts an octave above that of the cello. Experiments were made, starting in the later 19th century, to produce an instrument of sufficient size to provide the desired resonance while remaining small enough to be manageable.



A violin (top) and viola (below). How does the size of the instruments affect their pitch? Image: whstatic.com

# PRE-SHOW EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES, pg. 2

## 1) INFLUENCES

**Goal:** To reflect on influences in our life

**Explanation:** Wil B and Kev chose to name their group after Stuff Smith, a jazz violinist from the swing era. Smith's final and most soulful album was titled "Black Violin." His work inspired Wil B and Kev so much that they decided to name their group in honor of him. In this activity, students will think about someone who influences or inspires.

### Materials:

- ◇ Paper
- ◇ Writing utensil

### Activity:

1. Give each student a piece of paper.
2. Ask them to fold it in half and then in half again, so that it is divided into fourths.
3. Next, ask students to think about someone who influences or inspires them. Have them write this person's name at the top of the paper.
4. Let students know that you will be asking them a series of questions about this person. They will record their thoughts to each question in the separate quadrants on their paper.

Quadrant 1: What do you admire about this person?

Quadrant 2: In what ways does this person influence or inspire you? Be specific.

Quadrant 3: Do you feel that you and this person have similar goals? If so, what are they?

Quadrant 4: What are some things you could do to achieve these goals?

### Follow-up Questions:

1. What qualities make someone admirable?
2. What can we learn from those who inspire us?
3. Why is it good to have someone that you look up to that inspires you?
4. Are our influences always positive? What can you do to make sure that you choose people to admire that have a positive impact on your life?

## 2) EXPLORE THE VIOLIN

**Goal:** To research various aspects of the violin instrument and synthesize findings in order to present

**Explanation:** The members of Black Violin fell in love with the violin instrument as young performers. In this activity, students will work in groups to learn more about this classic yet highly versatile instrument. They will then choose a creative medium to present their findings to the class.

### Materials:

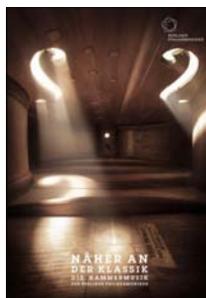
- ◇ Library or other research materials
- ◇ Paper, markers, or other art supplies

### Activity:

1. Divide students into small groups.
2. Assign each group a topic to research:
  - ◇ The history of the violin
  - ◇ An explanation of how violins are made
  - ◇ An explanation of how violins produce sounds
  - ◇ An explanation of how the violin is played
  - ◇ Why antique violins are desirable and/or why Stradivarius instruments are highly valued
  - ◇ The importance of varnish on acoustic violins
  - ◇ Acoustic violins versus electric violins
3. Invite students to present their findings to the class. Challenge them to present their findings in a creative way, such as creating a poster, a wrap, video, or other artistic expression.

### Follow-up Questions:

1. What did you know about the violin prior to your research?
2. What is the most interesting thing you learned researching your topic?
3. What is the most interesting thing you learned from another group's presentation?
4. Which presentation stood out to you the most? Why?



### JUST FOR FUN

Share these amazing photos of the inside of musical instruments, including a violin and cello, taken by a photographer for an ad campaign for the Berlin Philharmonic.



[CLICK TO ACCESS](#)

# PRE-SHOW EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES, pg. 1

## 3) “TRIUMPH”

**Goal:** To preview a Black Violin performance; to explore the theme of choice and music’s positive influence in young people’s lives

**Explanation:** In this activity, students will watch the Black Violin music video “Triumph” which depicts a young boy facing the choice between the temptations of the street and picking up a musical instrument at school. They will then write a journal entry from the perspective of one of the characters in the video.

### Materials:

- ◇ Computer with internet access
- ◇ Critical Response Worksheet, pg. 12
- ◇ Paper
- ◇ Pencils

### Activity Part 1—View the Video

1. As a class, watch Black Violin’s music video “Triumph” (access by clicking on the image below).
2. As they watch, ask students to fill in the “Critical Response Worksheet”\* on page 12. The worksheet asks them to record what they notice in the video, what it reminds them of, what questions they have as they watch, what emotions they feel or see, and what they think the meaning of the piece is.
3. After the video ends, give students additional time to continue to fill in their Critical Response Worksheet.
4. Next, invite students to share one of their top observations, questions, memories, feelings or speculations.

### Activity Part 2—Journal Writing

1. Next, ask students to think about the different people or characters they saw in the music video (the boy, his mother, the musicians, etc.)
2. Ask them to write a journal entry from the perspective of one of these characters. In the journal entry, they must include the following:
  - ◇ A problem that the person sees or is facing
  - ◇ At least one question
  - ◇ At least one word or phrase from their Critical Response Worksheet
3. Provide them with time to free write.
4. Pair students up and ask them to share their journal entries with one another.

### Follow-up Questions:

1. Whose perspective did you choose to write your journal entry from? Why?
2. Did you and your partner choose to write from the same person’s perspective? If not, what drew your partner to write about who they chose?
3. What do you think is the relationship between the boy and the musicians?
4. Why do you think this video is called “Triumph”?
5. Why do you think Black Violin chose to tell this particular story in their music video?





# RESOURCES AND SOURCES



## BOOKS

### Picture Books:

- ◇ *This Jazz Man* by Karen Erhardt
- ◇ *Lift Every Voice and Sing* by James Weldon Johnson
- ◇ *Across the Alley* by Richard Michelson
- ◇ *Charlie Parker Played Be Bop* by Christopher Raschka
- ◇ *Sweet Music in Harlem* by Debbie A. Taylor

### Chapter Books:

- ◇ *Yolanda's Genius* by Carol Fenner
- ◇ *Second Fiddle or, How to Tell a Blackbird from a Sausage* by Siobhan Parkinson
- ◇ *The Minstrel's Melody* by Eleanora E. Tate

### Teen Fiction:

- ◇ *Harlem Hustle* by Janet McDonald
- ◇ *The Mozart Season* by Virginia Euwer Wolff
- ◇ *Sky: A Novel in 3 Sets and an Encore* by Roderick Townley
- ◇ *Good Enough* by Paula Yoo

**Also, check your local library for nonfiction books on violins and African Americans in Music.**

## CLASSROOM RESOURCES:

Black Violin Documentary. <http://vimeo.com/45099378>

*View this 10-minute documentary on the group, how they got started with music as young people and their journey. Note: mild adult language at 1:29.*

"Classical Music."

<http://classicalmusic.about.com/od/classicalmusic101/a/intro072104.htm>

*Provides an overview of different classical music periods, composers, and characteristics.*

"Examining Hip Hop Culture." PBS

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmile/features/examining-hip-hop-culture/>

*Features interviews with several hip-hop artists discussing hip-hop culture, its controversies, and its purest form as an agent of social change.*

Jazz, by Chuck Vanderchuck Jazz.

*Student-friendly animations, games and other content about jazz music and its history.*

[http://pbskids.org/chuck/video\\_jazz.html](http://pbskids.org/chuck/video_jazz.html)

## STUDY GUIDE SOURCES:

"Glossary." Naxos: the World's Leading Classical Music Group.

<http://www.naxos.com/>

Ovations Offstage. Study for the School-Time Performance of Black Violin. Portland Ovations.

<http://portlandovations.org/files/study-guides/black-violin.pdf>

"Teacher Study Guide: Black Violin." Alaska Junior Theater.

<http://www.kidsentertainment.net/2013-2014/roster/black-violin/docs/>