

BLACK VIOLIN

STUDY GUIDE • JANUARY 31, 2020
CHANDLER CENTER FOR THE ARTS



Chandler Center for the Arts welcomes you to the school-day performance of Black Violin – a blend of classical, bluegrass, rock, hip-hop, and R&B music that teaches students to bust stereotypes, break boundaries, and be themselves.

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. Kev Marcus and Wil-B have created the ultimate synergy between classical and hip-hop music, and with it an incredible opportunity to reach young children. They have been given awards for their outstanding contributions to middle and high school performing arts students. Both graduates of Dillard Performing Arts High School used their musical talents to earn full scholarships to college. Now Black Violin wants to make sure that America’s young people get the same exposure to the arts, and therefore the same opportunity that they did.

The duo are also avid producers and writers, which is demonstrated on their debut self-titled album that gives the listener pop music from the violins’ point-of-view. Black Violin’s enthusiasm for music and neo-classical, innovative, urban style of violin mixtures, vocals, and funk has exploded onto the music scene with the consistency of listeners wanting more and more.

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Kev Marcus is the stage name of Kevin Sylvester. His mother was the person encouraged him to take violin lessons. He hopes that his performances inspire his audiences to think about how they could do things differently in their lives and how to be unique to themselves and their goals. Kev Marcus studied at Florida International University.



Wil B is the stage name of performer Wilner Baptiste. When he first started out in music, he wanted to study the saxophone. However, a scheduling error put him in classes for the viola, and he decided to stick it out. When he performs, he wants to leave as better people than when they arrived. Wil B studied at Florida State University.



STUDENTS CAN RELECT ON THESE QUESTIONS BEFORE THE SHOW.

1. What is your relationship with music? Do you play an instrument? Sing in a chorus?
2. What are your favorite genres or types of music?
3. What are the different ways music is used in the world?
4. What are the ways music expresses emotions? (tempo, timbre, pitches)
5. What are the ways music is used to tell a story?

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The violin makes the highest sound in the orchestra. First violins play the melody of the piece, while second violins play between the melody and harmony. The violin is played by resting it between the chin and left shoulder while moving a bow across the strings or plucking the strings with the right hand.

EXAMPLE: <https://youtu.be/p-JFWsrPViy>



The viola is slightly larger than the violin and has thicker strings. An orchestra will have 10-14 violas and they play the harmony of the piece. The viola is played the same way the violin is played.

EXAMPLE: <https://youtu.be/opZ53-Gcz6E>

The cello is four feet long and has a variety of pitches it can accomplish. It is also the instrument that sounds the most like the human voice. An orchestra will have 8-12 cellos. The cello is played by sitting down while it rests on the ground. The instrument also sits between the legs and rests against the left shoulder.



EXAMPLE: <https://youtu.be/UToOkx2jUZM>



The double bass is over six feet long and is the biggest instrument in the string family. The orchestra will have 6-8 double basses. Musicians will stand while playing the instrument and have it rest against their left shoulder.

EXAMPLE: <https://youtu.be/QupB4NN8fI0>

The harp is six feet tall and shaped like the number 7. It contains 47 strings of different lengths which are plucked by your fingers to play different notes. The harp also has foot pedals that will change the pitch of the strings.



EXAMPLE: <https://youtu.be/VjosmpcpOCA>

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DURING THE SHOW, STUDENTS WILL EXPERIENCE A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT MUSIC STYLINGS AND GENRES. THESE ARE SOME OF THE GENRES STUDENTS MAY BE ABLE TO PICK OUT:



Classical music is defined as music written primarily throughout Europe during the time period of 1750 to 1830. The benchmark of classical music is identifying the form in which it is written. Classical scores were written and named for their forms. Examples of the various forms include minuet, trio, sonata, and rondo. Instruments commonly used in the genre featured the string family (violin, viola, cello, harpsichord, piano) and woodwind family (clarinet, flute, oboe). Well-known composers of the classical era include Mozart (*left*), Beethoven, Vivaldi, and Bach.



Bluegrass music originated from the stories and songs of European immigrants who settled in the Appalachian region of the United States (Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, North and South Carolina). The first known performance of a band that identified with the term “bluegrass” took place in 1939 at the Grand Ole Opry, by Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys. In the 1940s, bluegrass music incorporated one of its signature sound instruments: the banjo. Other instruments that help make this genre unique include the string bass, resonator guitar (dobro), harmonica, mandolin, and fiddle. Well-known bluegrass musicians include Alison Krauss, the Avett Brothers, Nickel Creek, and Mumford and Sons (*left*).



Rock is a genre of music that gets its origins in rock and roll and pop music during the late 1960s. The instruments, featured in a rock piece include electric guitar, electric bass, drums, and vocals. Rock songs will use a verse-chorus format where it will give a new verse of lyrics and then have the chorus repeat itself throughout the song. Some subgenres of rock include punk, glam rock, soft rock, heavy metal, alternative, and pop rock. Some popular rock musicians and groups include Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, Led Zeppelin, Patti Smith, Ramones, and Queen (*left*).



R&B stands for “Rhythm and Blues”, a name given in the 1970s; however, this genre of music originated in African Communities in the 1940s (a segregated time in the U.S., post WWII). Defined by its new name, “Rhythm” refers to the primary influence of the beat of the drums, cymbals, and snares to drive the song forward, and “Blues” reflects the subject matter of the songs. Well-known R&B artists include Sam Cooke, Alicia Keys, Usher, and John Legend (*left*).



Hip-Hop music originated in New York City in the late 1970s by African American and Latino communities located in the Bronx. Hip-Hop features musical hooks that repeat and can be modified using turntables, run by a deejay. Vocal artists would rhyme verses (rapping) to the beats used by the deejay. The Hip-Hop sound is often accompanied by a visual art called graffiti and a style of dancing called break-dancing or “B-Boying”. The first Hip-Hop deejay was Kool Herc (Clive Campbell). Some popular Hip-Hop artists of today include Jay-Z (*left*), Drake, Kendrick Lamar, and Cardi B.

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SONG ANALYSIS: Help students learn the sound of individual instruments by using the links on page 3. Then, pick three favorite pieces of music by Black Violin or other artists in the genres listed on page 4. Play the first selection from Black Violin (or another artist) and ask students to fill out the worksheet below as they listen.

1. What instruments can you hear playing for this piece?
2. Describe the tempo and beat of the piece. What does it feel like when this piece plays? What does your body want to do?
3. What genre of music would you place this piece in?
4. Where in the world do you think this piece came from?
5. Are there different sections of this piece? Do certain parts repeat? Describe the different sections or repeating parts.
6. Give some adjectives that describe this piece of music.
7. If you had to use this piece to tell a story, what kind of story would you tell?
8. What kind of character would sing or perform this song?
9. How do you feel when you listen to this piece of music?
10. What was your opinion of this piece of music?

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STRING INSTRUMENTS:

Draw a line from each instrument to its name.



HARP

CELLO

VIOLIN

VIOLA

DOUBLE BASS