

BLACK VIOLIN



Study Guide

Black Violin
2025-2026

ABOUT BLACK VIOLIN



Wil Baptiste (bottom left) immigrated to the United States from the Bahamas with his family at the age of 11. He hoped to join the school band to play saxophone, but accidentally was placed in the string program. He grew to love the viola and mastered it as well as the trumpet, drums and bass guitar.

Kev Marcus (top left) began playing violin at age 9, with the encouragement of his mother. He and Wil Baptiste met while attending the famed Dillard High School of the Performing Arts in Fort Lauderdale, Florida where they were trained in the classical tradition. During their class and practice time they developed firm classic techniques and in free time listened to hip hop and rhythm and blues.

Both Wil Baptiste and Kev Marcus attended college on full music scholarships. Wil-B attended Florida State, and Kev Marcus went to Florida International University.



Black Violin was born when Marcus heard the music of violinist Stuff Smith, considered to be the first violinist to use electrical amplification techniques on a violin. His professor sat him down at a lesson and told him to listen.

Marcus said Smith's music was "unbelievable", saying "classical violin with soul and fire. I loved it." He passed the music on to Wil Baptiste and together they decided to form a band, calling it Black Violin, named after Smith's eponymous soulful solo album. Inspired by Smith's music, the two realized that they could synthesize all the styles they loved: classical, jazz, R&B, hip-hop, and even reggae and gypsy music.

Along with their DJ - DJ SPS, drummer - Nat Stokes, and keyboardist - Liston Gregory, Kev and Wil have created the ultimate synergy between Classical and Hip- Hop music, and through it an incredible opportunity to reach young children. Among their achievements Black Violin clinched the Showtime at the Apollo 2005 Legend title, performed on the same bill with some of the industry's biggest artists and performed at the official President's Inaugural Ball in 2013. In addition, Black Violin has composed for a major FOX Television original *Pitch*, and has been featured by ESPN as the official artist of the 2017 US Open (tennis) and 2016 & 2017 Heisman Trophy Award ceremonies. They have been featured on *The Tonight Show*, *The Today Show*, *Ellen*, *The Wendy William's Show*, NPR, and more. The two are also avid producers and writers, and have released four albums of original music: *Black Violin* (2007), *Classically Trained* (2013), *Stereotypes* (2015), *Take the Stairs* (2019), and *Full Circle* (2025). They also have a debut holiday album, *Give Thanks* that was released in November of 2020. The band has earned a Grammy Award nomination for "Best Contemporary Instrumental Album" for *Take the Stairs* and a Grammy Award nomination for "Best Americana Performance" for their track "The Message" in collaboration with the band The Blind Boys of Alabama.

One of Black Violin's most well-known works, "Brandenburg", "quotes" J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto no. 3 movement 1, one of six works widely held as the most influential and finest compositions of the Baroque period. (In jazz, performers "quote" musical material by using melodies and ideas

from other artists as the basis for their interpretation.) In 1721, Bach presented a series of six concerti to the Margrave of Brandenburg, who then put these great works on the shelf where they sat until the 19th century. Bach wrote each concerto, often requiring virtuosos to play the solos, for a different combination of instruments. No. 3 was composed for three violins, three violas, three cellos, and basso continuo, while No. 6 does not use a violin at all!

"Dirty Orchestra" utilizes fugues and counterpoints to create a musical narrative.. A fugue is a composition tool in which one instrument plays a short melody, then another instrument echoes the pieces, then another echoes, and so on, with all parts interweaving into each other. Counterpoints in music are two corresponding melodies that are played at the same time.

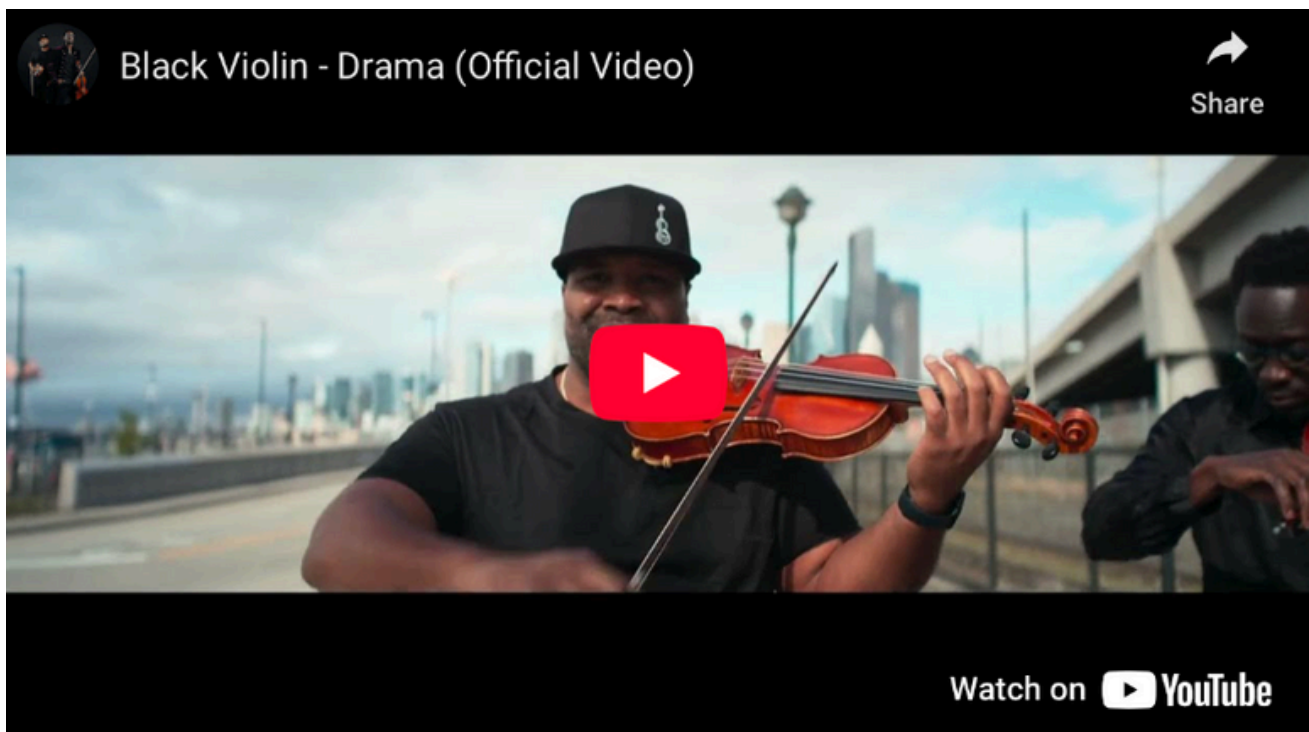
"Gypsy" takes its cue in the Romani musical tradition that has influenced classical music since Bach and Haydn, and particularly Liszt, Dvorak, and Bartok. In turn, the local musical traditions influenced the music and style of the Roma (gypsies) living there. For example, in Spain, they are known for Flamenco. The Roma are a nomadic people, originally from India, and have migrated westward for the past two thousand years (they picked up the name "gypsy" in the 1500's because it was believed they were from Egypt.) Romani music is most associated with the violin, incorporating changes in tempo, slides in notes and pitches, energy and soul.

For more info on Black Violin visit:
<http://blackviolin.net>

WHAT TO EXPECT

Wil Baptiste and **Kev Marcus** collaborate with DJ SPS, drummer Nat Stokes, and keyboardist Liston Gregory to create their signature multi-genre sound. Audiences will recognize elements of songs by artists from Puccini to the Temptations, from Imagine Dragons to Johann Sebastian Bach. DJ's like DJ SPS cut and loop beats to recreate music. They also pause, scratch, backspin, speed up or slow down, and/or delay the music. In its simplest form cutting would involve cutting a few bars of the beat and looping it to create a continuous sound.

In the beginning of the use of turntables, DJs would have two identical records. When the first record finished playing the song's break, or an interlude in the music in which everything stops except the percussion, the DJ stops playing that record and plays the second record at the break. The DJ would set the first record back to the break and play that once the second record finished, and continue this indefinitely.



GLOSSARY



Hip-hop music - a musical genre that began in the South Bronx of New York City in the 1970's. It is defined by four central stylistic elements: rapping, DJ-ing, sampling, and beatboxing.

Jazz - a musical art form characterized by blue notes, syncopation, swing, call and response, polyrhythms, and improvisation. Originating in African-American communities in the early 20th century, jazz has been called "the first original art form" to develop in the United States of America.

Blues - a musical form created primarily within the African-American communities in the Deep South of the United States at the end of the 19th century from spirituals, work songs, field hollers, narrative ballads, shouts, and chants. The genre is characterized by specific chord progressions- most commonly a 12 bar progression.

Classical music - music, usually European and from the 18th or 19th centuries, following Western music traditions such as fugue and counterpoint.

Theme - a melody around which a musical composition is based.

Fugue - a composition tool in which one instrument plays a short melody then another instrument echoes the piece, then another echoes, and so on so that all parts interweave with each other.

Counterpoint - the relationship between two melodies in a piece of music that fit together harmoniously, but have different rhythms.

Composer - a person who writes music.

Concerto - A form of music that features a solo instrument with an orchestra or other ensemble.

Melody - a series of notes that form a distinctive sequence.

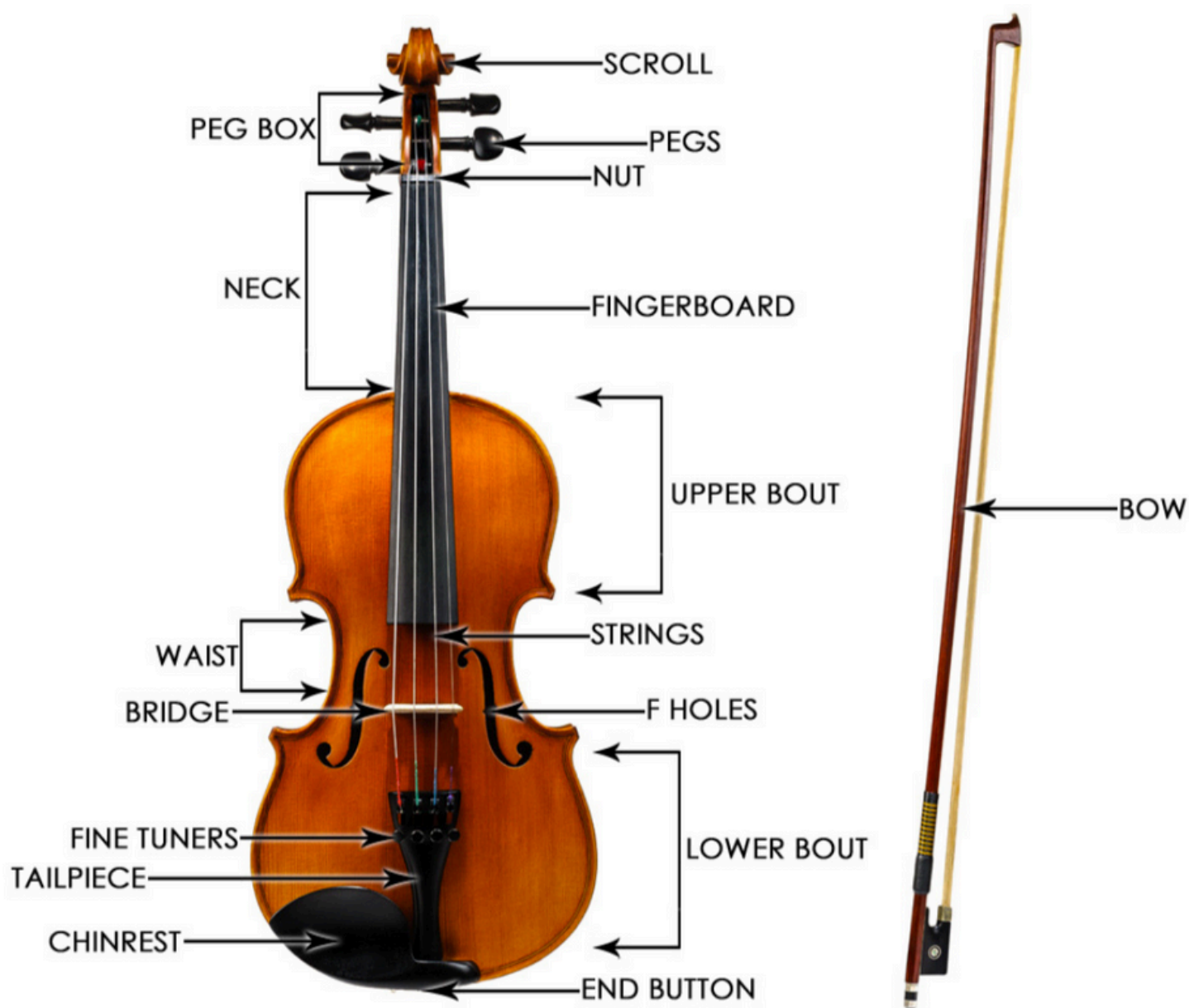
Musical score - the written form of a musical composition.

DJ - "Disc Jockey" someone who uses musical performance techniques, selects and plays music to accompany MCs/rappers, singers or in the case of Black Violin, other musicians.

Canon - A type of structure where a theme or melody is introduced, and later the same melody or a variation, is layered on top.

Ostinato - A stable and constant repeating rhythm.

ANATOMY OF A VIOLIN



ACTIVITIES

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

Students will conduct research and write an informative essay on topics relating to the violin such as:

- History of the violin
- Explanation of how violins are made
- Explanation of how violins make sound
- Explanation of how the violin is played
- The importance of varnish on acoustic violins
- Influential violinists

Students will explore different genres, mix them up to create something new and write about what they did to change the genre:

- Choose a recognizable piece of music that your students will know the lyrics to, such as “The Star Spangled Banner or “Believer” by Imagine Dragons.
- Ask the whole class to sing the chorus of the song through a few times.
- Then introduce different genres like Country, Opera, Jazz, Classical and ask the students to sing that same chorus but in the style or variation of that new genre.
- Have students write an explanation of what they did to change the genres.

POST SHOW ACTIVITIES

- Students will write an argumentative essay for or against combining different types of music, such as, but not limited to, classical and hip-hop.
- Students will write an argumentative essay for or against their school being more involved in the arts (possible audience: principal/BOE/PTA). The essay should include the benefits of musical study.
- Students will write a narrative of their experience at the Black Violin Concert.
- From the perspective of the violin, write a creative narrative about “The Day in the Life of Wil Baptiste's Violin”, using rich adjectives and verbs to describe sensory details, feelings and emotions.

For more about Black Violin’s music, tour dates, and background info visit <http://blackviolin.net>