



Black Violin | Biography



“Black Violin works hard, but makes it all look like play... Sometimes they play with the intense seriousness of orchestral soloists; at others they fiddle as if at a hoedown; at still others they strum the violin and viola like guitars.” N.Y. Times

It’s hard to think of another African-American violin player to make their mark in popular music, so classically trained South Florida twosome, Wilner “Wil B” Baptiste and Kevin “Kev Marcus” Sylvester, who go by the name Black Violin are a welcome revelation for their ability to meld highbrow and pop culture, “Brandenburg” and “breakdown,” into a single genre-busting act. The band’s most recent album, *Classically Trained*, is the follow-up to their 2007 self-titled debut on their own Di-Versatile Music Group label, which is as good an introduction to their groundbreaking blend of classical, hip-hop, rock, R&B, and even bluegrass music.

Wil B and Kev Marcus are classically trained viola and violin players who first met playing in the high school orchestra in Fort Lauderdale, FL. After graduating college, they joined up as hip-hop studio rats in the South Florida, working with several different acts before returning to their roots by fusing the two genres in a groundbreaking collaboration that has seen them play their music for everybody from the troops in Iraq to both the official President’s Inaugural Ball and the Kids Inaugural in Washington, DC, where Barack Obama himself gave each a hearty hand-shake and man hug, as First Lady Michelle Obama looked on approvingly. The pair also headlined 40 shows in two stints at the New Victory Theater on Broadway, including 16 sold-out shows over two weeks last November. Along the way, they’ve wowed audiences at the legendary Harlem Apollo Theatre, accompanied Alicia Keys’ performance of “Karma” at the 2004 Billboard Awards, and appeared with Gym Class Heroes and Fall Out Boy’s Patrick Stump playing the hit song, “Stereo Hearts,” for VH1’s *Unplugged*.

Since starting Black Violin a decade ago—named after an album by preeminent African-American swing era jazz violinist Stuff Smith—Wil B and Kev have performed an average of 200 shows a year in 49 states and 36 countries as far away as Dubai, Prague and South Africa, while appearing at official NFL celebrations for three Super Bowls and last year’s U.S. Open in Forest Hills with Jordin Sparks. The pair has played with the likes of Linkin Park member Mike Shinoda’s Fort Minor, while opening for Fat Joe, Akon and the Wu-Tang Clan. Individually and together, Black Violin has collaborated with the likes of P. Diddy, Kanye West, 50 Cent, Tom Petty, Aerosmith, Aretha Franklin and The Eagles. Kev supplied strings for a track on Lupe Fiasco’s Grammy-nominated Food & Liquor 2 album, and appeared on the Meek Mill cut “Maybach Curtains” with John Legend, Rick Ross and Nas. Wil and Kev also scored an episode of CSI: New York, adapting the finale of Puccini’s Madame Butterfly for an on-screen murder. “It’s now time to spread the word about Black Violin,” insists Kev. “The groundswell is just beginning.”

Take a listen to songs like “Jammin’,” “Dirty Orchestra,” “Virtuoso,” “Rock Anthem” or “Brandenburg,” which puts the “backbeat” to Bach’s famed concertos, or check out Wil B and Kev Marcus strut the stage with their instruments like rock stars on their YouTube page, effortlessly combining different forms of music. With Wil B’s smooth vocals, Black Violin has even begun to explore R&B and soul on songs like the dreamy “End of the World” and the plaintive ballad, “Interlude (Tiffany).” The result is inspiring to all ages, though Black Violin remains particularly committed to turning young fans on to their own potential through a tireless schedule of appearances at schools, where they constantly stress the importance of arts education. Their “triumph” is the outcome of a decade-long effort that has seen them bridge the gap between the worlds of classical and popular music.

“We’re passionate about it because we realize how fortunate we were to grow up having access to that,” explains Wil B. “It’s something in which we take a great deal of pride. We encourage kids to think creatively, to take what they love doing and try to come up with something no one has ever done before. And that doesn’t just apply to playing violin or even music, but whatever it is you decide to do. Expand your mind. Once we get their attention with the music, that’s the message we want to deliver.”

The video for the song “Triumph” illustrates the concept perfectly, as a young boy is faced with choosing between the temptations of the street and picking up a musical instrument at school.

“Black Violin is all about overcoming your obstacles and staying strong,” says Wil, something he and Kev have achieved in their decade together.

“It takes 10 years to become an overnight sensation,” nods Kev. “This is just the beginning for us. Our best selling point is, we could be anywhere in the world before any kind of audience, when we pull out our instruments, people stop what they’re doing and watch.”

“We’re looking to break out of our own box and grow the brand,” concludes Wil. “We’re living proof that people can overcome their obstacles and triumph. This is something new and fresh. We want people to see what we’re all about.”

Once you do, you will never forget Black Violin.