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, and drummer, Nat Stokes, 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, Ellen, The Wendy Williams’ Show, NPR, and more. The two are also avid producers and writers, and have released three albums of original music: Black Violin (2007), Classically Trained (2013), and Stereotypes (2015). Their next album, Take the Stairs, is set to be released in November of 2019.

One of Black Violin’s most well-known works, “Brandenburg”, “quotes” J.S. Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto no. 3 movement, 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.
Wil Baptiste and Kev Marcus collaborate with DJ SPS and drummer Nat Stokes 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. DJs 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.
**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.
POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

POST-SHOW

Discussion Questions
Which songs did you recognize during the video (both pop/hip-hop and classical)?

What did you think of the music? Did the different styles mesh effectively and sound harmonious, or was it more jarring and discordant?

If you have been to a traditional classical music concert and/or hip-hop concert, how did this compare? What were the differences? What were the similarities?

Black Violin named their group after an album by Stuff Smith, a jazz violinist from the swing era. If you had to give the group a different name, what would it be and why?

Assignment
After viewing the video, ask students to write a letter to the Black Violin musicians. Discuss with students what they want to ask them and what they want to tell them about themselves.

Letters may be sent to:
Arts Education Department
Mondavi Center, UC Davis
One Shields Ave.
Davis, CA 95616

NEW CALIFORNIA ARTS STANDARDS

- Responding—Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work
  7.1 Individuals’ selection of musical works is influenced by their interests, experiences, understandings, and purposes.
  4-8.MU:Re7.1; Nov-Adv.MU:H.Re7.1
  7.2 Response to music is informed by analyzing context (social, cultural, and historical) and how creators and performers manipulate the elements of music.
  4-8.MU:Re7.2; Nov-Adv.MU:H.Re7.2

- Responding—Anchor Standard 9: Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work
  The personal evaluation of musical work(s) and performance(s) is informed by analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.
  4-8.MU:Re9; Nov-Adv.MU:H.Re8

- Connecting—Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art
  Musicians connect their personal interests, experiences, ideas, and knowledge to creating, performing, and responding.
  4-8. MU:Cn10; Nov-Adv.MU:H.Cn10

- Connecting—Anchor Standard 11: Relate Artistic Ideas and Works with Societal, Cultural, and Historical Context to Deepen Understanding
  Musicians connect societal, cultural, and historical contexts when creating, performing, and responding.
  4-8.MU:Cn11; Nov-Adv.MU:H.Cn11
Mondavi Center Arts Education

Ruth Rosenberg, Director of Arts Education and Artist Engagement
Jennifer Mast, Arts Education Coordinator

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