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Black Violin

nytheatre.com review

Rohana Elias-Reyes · March 14, 2009

Kids have no expectations about what a violin should or should not do; neither do Kev Marcus and Wil-B of *Black Violin*. They move comfortably between genres: from jazz to rap, from hip-hop to classical, and since they have the chops to back it up, this is a beautiful thing.

The New Victory Theater is another beautiful thing. It's a gorgeous little theater, and more than that, it's an organization that gets kids and their parents. I arrived juggling a bag of swim class gear with a sleeping kid slung over my shoulder and another in desperate need of a bathroom. No problem. The bathroom was clean and complete with a stool, the theater has lockers where you can stow your kid's stuff free of charge, and no fewer than three staff members asked me if they could help. "That's ok," I said, as I gently placed my son on the ground, loaded up the locker, and then stepped back...on to my son's hand. Amazingly he woke up in a good mood and ready to hear some music.

So in we went to my kids' first hip-hop concert experience complete with smoke machine, body-vibrating beats from drummer Beatdown, and scratching and mixing from DJ TK. My five-year-old daughter was instantly mesmerized and shortly busting moves that she must've learned in her Brooklyn kindergarten. Her three-year-old little brother was throwing his hands in the air and clapping along to the irresistible beat. That being said, do heed the recommendation that the show is best for kids six and up; though my kids had a great time, they were really too young and sticking out the last 15 minutes was tough for them.

I would have liked more consistent balance during the performance. There were moments when the tracks from DJ TK and the rhythm from Beatdown were so powerful, and just so loud, that I could barely hear Kev or Wil-B. Whenever I could hear the strings, they were great. Will-B played his viola "Tiffany" to great effect on the Fugees "Ready or Not" and both shone in an interpretation of Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3*, though they neglected to mention the composer or work, and simply announced they were going to play "some classical." A fun part of the show was a playing contest between the two musicians.

In the end, *Black Violin* is not an edgier more urban *Little Einsteins* and its mission is not to teach kids that allegro means fast or adagio means slow. However, the kids may learn that freestyle is another way to say improvise; that old-school can mean the Temptations, Slick Rick and Doug E Fresh, or someone really old school—like Johann Sebastian Bach; and that all of these things and more are fair game for a couple of string players, a DJ, and a drummer. In fact, if the kids are really paying attention, they may notice that members of *Black Violin* don't just make music—they are constantly listening and responding to each other through music. So while the set the group played is probably identical to what they do for an adult audience, there is a great takeaway for kids: if you work hard and you love what you do, not only can playing the violin be really cool, it is also a lot of fun.

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