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Time Out New York Kids / Issue 41 : Mar 1–31, 2009

Review

Black Violin

New Victory Theater. Conceived and designed by Wilner Baptiste and Kevin Sylvester. 60 min. No intermission.

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The seats at the New Victory really get in the way during *Black Violin*, a raucous, rousing, genre-busting performance piece that dares the audience to get up and dance—assuming you can find the space. (Security won't let you on stage, so don't even try.) The band, particularly frontmen Wilner Baptiste and Kevin Sylvester, encourage everyone to defy convention and follow their instincts, just as the two men did when they decided to combine their virtuosic violin and viola skills with their love of hip-hop. The Miami-based duo has played with the likes of P. Diddy and Alicia Keys and is one of the few groups out there that fuses seemingly incongruous musical styles, from reggae to rap, jazz to classical. They count Shostakovich and Jay-Z among their influences, and during this hour-long set they cover the Fugees, J.S. Bach and Cold Play.



Black Violin
Photo by Colin Brennan

But their self-titled show is more than just a concert. Decked out in jeans and oversize tees, the guys—who met at a Florida public high school where they began to develop their signature stylistic mash-up—engage in adorably goofy banter, freestyle and even do battle just as rappers do, only with strings instead of stinging remarks. They also chat about their humble beginnings, and share the cliché but clearly heartfelt message that kids should follow their dreams, no matter how offbeat.

It should be noted that a number of folks walked out during the show, so it's definitely not for everyone. (If the subway's too loud for you, bring earplugs.) Then again, there were a lot of adult fans there sans kids. *Black Violin* is not your parents' kids' show—unless mom and dad happen to have Nas on their iPod. If you're a parent like me, you probably do.—*Raven Snook*

Black Violin is playing at the New Victory Theater through Mar 22. Tickets: \$12.50—\$35.

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