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**SILK ROAD PROJECT PARTNERS WITH SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION TO  
PRODUCE FOLKWAYS FESTIVAL**

**2002 Festival to Explore the Many Cultures of the Silk Road**

June 26, 2002, New York—The 36th annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival will explore the cross-cultural influences among the lands of the ancient and fabled Silk Road, from Japan to Italy. The 2002 Festival, *The Silk Road: Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust*, will be held outdoors on the National Mall between 7th and 14th streets Wednesday, June 26 through Sunday, June 30 and Wednesday, July 3 through Sunday, July 7. Admission is free. It is the first time that the entire Smithsonian Folklife Festival has been devoted to a single theme.

With trade routes that crisscrossed Asia and Europe—from the Pacific Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea—the historic Silk Road linked diverse cultures and peoples and promoted the unprecedented exchange of ideas, art, music, science, commerce, inventions and innovations, many of which influenced life in the United States. The Festival will be an international exhibition of Silk Road traditions with some 375 musicians, artisans, cooks and storytellers from the United States and more than 20 other countries telling the complex story of the Silk Road, its peoples and cultures, and the intercultural exchange it inspired.

The Festival will be laid out along the National Mall with magnificent pavilions that evoke the look and feel of Silk Road architecture. Visitors will follow the Silk Road from Nara, Japan (the pavilion closest to the U.S. Capitol) to Venice, Italy (the pavilion closest to the Washington Monument). On the way, they will pass through Xi'an, China; Samarkand, Uzbekistan; and Istanbul, Turkey.

"Besides providing vibrant oases for Silk Road travelers to trade their goods, these centers also fostered innovative artisan communities," says Richard Kennedy, deputy director of the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and co-curator of the Silk Road program. "Craftspeople and musicians who traced the route from city to city shared their skills along the way. Existing examples of ancient silk, pottery, carpets and glass all demonstrate and remind us of how much people across the region have been connected through history. What may be surprising to some, however, is how many of these arts are practiced today."

The Festival is produced in partnership with the Silk Road Project, a global initiative founded and led by renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma, in coordination with a distinguished team of scholars, musicians and artists from around the world. The purpose of the Silk

Road Project is to illuminate the Silk Road's historical contribution to the cross-cultural diffusion of arts, technologies and musical traditions, identify the voices that best represent its cultural legacy today and support innovative collaborations among outstanding artists from the lands of the Silk Road and the West.

"Throughout my travels, I have thought about the culture, religions and ideas that have been influential for centuries along these historic land and sea routes," Ma says, "and have wondered how these complex interconnections occurred and how many new musical voices were formed from the diversity of these traditions."

The Silk Road: Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust will highlight ways in which the many cultures of Europe and Asia were brought closer together through creative commercial and cultural exchanges that continue today and extend to life in the United States. Artists from the following countries will participate in the Festival: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China, India, Italy, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, South Korea, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United States and Uzbekistan. Participants, who speak 25 different languages, will emphasize the development of many living traditions, from noodle making to tea drinking, from stringed instruments to porcelain, and from silk textiles to carpet weaving.

Festival visitors will see demonstrations of martial arts, silk making, textile weaving, pottery painting, glass blowing, kite flying, calligraphy, puppetry and more. They will also be able to listen to and talk with traditional artists who still live along this legendary route and create products that draw on tradition but are influenced by the emerging global economy.

Ethnomusicologist Theodore Levin is co-curator of the Festival program. He says that it may well have been along the Silk Road that some of the first "world music" jam sessions took place. "For both Europeans and Asians, the mesmerizing sound of exotic instruments must have had an appeal not unlike the visual lure of exotic textiles, ceramics and glass. Innovative musicians adapted unfamiliar instruments to perform local music while simultaneously introducing non-native rhythmic patterns, scales and performance techniques."

"Before the Crusades," Levin continues, "numerous instruments from the Middle East and Central Asia had already reached Europe: lutes, viols, oboes, zithers and drums. Following trade routes in both directions, many of these instruments also turned up in China, Japan, India and Indonesia."