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## **THE SILK ROAD PROJECT TO SHARE MUSIC, GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND PASSION-DRIVEN LEARNING WITH NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLCHILDREN**

### **New York City Education Program is Cornerstone of the Silk Road Project's 10<sup>th</sup>-Anniversary Celebration**

**February 25, 2009**, Providence, RI – The Silk Road Project, a not-for-profit artistic, cultural and educational organization founded by renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma in 1998, announces an educational initiative for educators and sixth-grade students in New York City middle schools in collaboration with the New York City Department of Education. The partnership launches today with an introductory workshop for educators at Teachers College at Columbia University.

“In my experience, students who are passionate are a pleasure to teach and teachers who are passionate share their knowledge generously,” said Yo-Yo Ma, founder and artistic director.

“Learning and teaching have always been at the very heart of the Silk Road Project. I think there is no better way for us to begin our second decade than by inviting teachers and students from New York City’s public schools to join us in this ongoing exchange.”

The Silk Road Project’s New York City education initiative will help students bridge the foreign and the familiar by offering teacher training and hands-on multidisciplinary lessons integrating history, geography, science, music and the visual arts. It is being undertaken as part of the *Campaign for Middle School Success*, a multi-year strategic plan announced by the New York City Department of Education to improve the academic performance of middle-school students across the city.

“In New York City we’re committed to creating a culture of success in our middle schools,” Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein said. “Over the past year we’ve redoubled our efforts to ensure that all students leave the eighth grade ready for the challenges of high school. The lessons

developed by the Silk Road Project will provide teachers with a valuable new tool for making sure students begin their middle school years on the right foot. I can think of no one better equipped to inspire students through multicultural and interdisciplinary exchange than Yo-Yo Ma.”

The two-phase initiative launches today with an introductory workshop for 150 New York City middle school principals and teachers at Teacher’s College at Columbia University. Led by Stanford University faculty, the workshop will provide an introduction to the acclaimed Stanford Program on International Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) *Along the Silk Road* curriculum. This will be followed by a special performance and conversation with Yo-Yo Ma on passion-driven education in middle schools for more than 500 educators. Mr. Ma will be joined by Dr. Jenny Balfour-Paul and Silk Road Ensemble storyteller Ben Haggarty.

Throughout the spring 2009 semester, educators trained at the workshop will be invited to teach the *Along the Silk Road* curriculum to their students. The interactive lessons draw from a variety of disciplines, offering students multiple paths to explore the many aspects of the historic Silk Road—its geography, culture, belief systems, arts, languages and commerce—and to make connections between their studies and modern cross-cultural influences in our globalized world. This first phase of the program will culminate in June 2009, when participating students and their families will have a chance to hear Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble play. Details on the second phase of the Silk Road Project’s NYC education initiative, for the 2009-2010 school year will be announced at a later date.

“During the past few years, we have been able to train hundreds of teachers to use the *Along the Silk Road* curriculum, and we are thrilled to provide this multifaceted educational tool to teachers and students in New York,” stated Laura Freid, chief executive officer and executive director. “We are particularly pleased that we will be working with middle-school students who are at a pivotal point in their lives when making connections with a broader world can be of enormous benefit.”

## **Partners and Funding**

Thanks to the generous support of partner institutions, the Silk Road Project educational initiative in New York City will provide *Along the Silk Road* curricular materials and present collaborative performance opportunities at no cost to New York City public schools, with priority given to students and educators in Northern Manhattan and the Southern Bronx. The Silk Road Project is partnering with Teachers College at Columbia University, the Manhattan School of Music and the American Museum of Natural History.

The Silk Road Project education initiative is sponsored in part by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Ford Foundation. The New York City Department of Education's partnership with the Silk Road Project is part of the New York *Campaign for Middle School Success*. The *Along the Silk Road* curriculum was developed by the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) in partnership with the Silk Road Project, and workshops for educators will be conducted by curriculum experts from Stanford University.

## **Tours, Commissions and Performances Round Out the Anniversary**

The Silk Road Project officially launched its 10<sup>th</sup>-anniversary season with a special performance on U.N. Day, October 24, 2008, in the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations. Other highlights of the anniversary season will include a U.S. tour, festival concerts in Europe and the first performance by the Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma at New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Educational initiatives beyond New York City will include a series of workshops for students in Providence, RI. More information on the Silk Road Project's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration can be found at <http://www.silkroadproject.org>.

## **About the Silk Road Project**

The Silk Road Project is a not-for-profit artistic, cultural and educational organization with a vision of connecting the world's neighborhoods by bringing together artists and audiences around the globe. Cellist Yo-Yo Ma founded the Project in 1998 as a catalyst to promote innovation and learning through the arts. The Silk Road Project takes inspiration from the historical Silk Road trading route as a modern metaphor for multicultural and interdisciplinary exchange. Under the artistic direction of Mr. Ma and the executive direction of Laura Freid, the Silk Road Project presents performances by the Silk Road Ensemble, engages in cross-cultural exchanges and residencies, leads workshops for students, and partners with leading cultural institutions to create educational materials and programs. The Silk Road Project is affiliated with Harvard University and Rhode Island School of Design, where the Silk Road Ensemble holds regular residencies to promote cross-cultural and interdisciplinary interaction with students and

faculty. Developing new music is a central mission of the Silk Road Project, which has been involved in commissioning and performing more than 60 new musical and multimedia works from composers and arrangers from around the world.

### **About Yo-Yo Ma**

The many-faceted career of cellist Yo-Yo Ma is testament to his continual search for new ways to communicate with audiences and to his personal desire for artistic growth and renewal. Mr. Ma maintains a balance between his engagements as a soloist with orchestras worldwide and his recital and chamber music activities. His discography encompasses more than 75 albums, including 16 Grammy award winners. One of Mr. Ma's goals is the investigation of music as a means of communication and a vehicle for the migration of ideas; in 1998 he established the Silk Road Project to promote the study of cultural, artistic and intellectual traditions along the ancient Silk Road trade routes. Mr. Ma was born in Paris to Chinese parents who later moved the family to New York. He began to study the cello at the age of four, attended the Juilliard School, and in 1976 graduated from Harvard University. He has received numerous awards, including the 1978 Avery Fisher Prize, the 1999 Glenn Gould Prize, the 2001 National Medal of Arts, the 2006 Sonning Prize, the 2006 Dan David Prize, and the 2008 World Economic Forum's Crystal Award. In 2006, he was designated a United Nations Messenger of Peace by then Secretary-General Kofi Annan. In 2007, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon extended his appointment.

### **About the Silk Road Ensemble**

The Silk Road Ensemble is a collective of internationally renowned musicians, composers, arrangers, visual artists and storytellers from more than 20 countries. Each Ensemble member's career illustrates a unique response to what is one of the artistic challenges of our times: nourishing global connections while maintaining the integrity of art rooted in authentic tradition. Many of the musicians first came together under the artistic direction of Yo-Yo Ma at a workshop at Tanglewood Music Center in Massachusetts in 2000. Since then, in various configurations, Ensemble artists have collaborated on a diverse range of musical and multimedia projects, presenting innovative performances that explore the relationship between tradition and innovation in music from the East and West. The Silk Road Ensemble has recorded four albums and performed to critical acclaim throughout Asia, Europe and North America.