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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Students and Teachers to Celebrate Learning with Yo-Yo Ma,
Damian Woetzel and members of the Silk Road Ensemble
at the American Museum of Natural History**

**“Connect Live!” Event on June 3, 2010, Culminates First Year of
Silk Road Connect Pilot Program in New York City Public Schools**

June 3, 2010, New York, NY —The Silk Road Project, a nonprofit arts and educational organization founded by renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma, announces the culmination of the first year of Silk Road Connect, its program for educators and middle school students currently being piloted with sixth-graders in five public schools in collaboration with the New York City Department of Education. Year one of the Silk Road Connect program concludes today with an event for all participating students and teachers with Yo-Yo Ma and former ballet star Damian Woetzel in the American Museum of Natural History’s Milstein Hall of Ocean Life.

“In my experience, musicians and teachers share a common goal: to communicate in a way that is memorable, that transports their audience,” said Yo-Yo Ma. “Transformative learning remains active in students’ minds and connects to future experiences. I hope when the students from our five pilot schools come together at the American Museum of Natural History to share and celebrate their year of learning, they will experience being part of something larger than themselves, and this day will be something they’ll always remember.”

In 2009, Schools Chancellor Joel Klein invited the Silk Road Project to pilot the Silk Road Connect program in New York City middle schools. The goals over a two-year period are to develop a sustainable and transferrable engagement program that establishes middle school as a platform for future success, promotes the integral role of the arts in academics, actively addresses multiple modes of learning, and inspires and energizes teachers. In its first year, Silk Road Connect worked with five schools in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. The program is designed to help students and teachers discover connections in and out of the classroom through regular visits by artists, musicians and performers; hands-on study of the historic Silk Road and the history and modern uses of the dye indigo; and an examination of origins on personal and global scales.

“Silk Road Connect has been a resounding success for New York City public schools. With partnerships like these, our students have access to the greatest, most brilliant artists and experts in the world,” Schools Chancellor Klein said.

The “Connect Live!” event today brings together approximately 450 sixth-grade students and 45 teachers in the American Museum of Natural History, where each class has come during the year to tour the “Traveling the Silk Road” exhibition and participate in related educational activities. Participating schools include East Bronx Academy for the Future, Edward Bleeker JHS 185 (Queens), Young Women’s Leadership School of Brooklyn, Frederick Douglass Academy III (the Bronx), and PS/MS 161 Pedro Albizu Campus School (Manhattan).

Mr. Ma will act as master of ceremonies for the program, which runs from 10:30 AM to 1:30 PM and includes 15-minute creative showcases by each school as well as music performed by the Silk Road Ensemble, video presentations and dance. Damian Woetzel, longtime principal dancer at the New York City Ballet and artistic director of the summer Vail International Dance Festival, is creative director for the event. Tracy Straus, artistic director of Celebrate the Beat and associate artistic director of the National Dance Institute, is movement director. Silk Road Ensemble cellist Mike Block is music director. Geneticist Spencer Wells, director of National Geographic’s Genographic Project, another partner in the Silk Road Connect program, will also be on hand, and the Silk Road Project will document the entire program to distribute as a DVD to all students and teachers.

About Silk Road Connect

Silk Road Connect is a multi-year, multidisciplinary educational initiative that employs hands-on experiences and the transformative power of the arts to enrich the existing sixth-grade curriculum and spark a lifelong passion for learning. By invitation from the New York City Department of Education and Chancellor Joel Klein, the Silk Road Project is piloting Silk Road Connect in New York City public middle schools during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years as a centerpiece of the Department’s Campaign for Middle School Success. Partner organizations include the American Museum of Natural History, the Manhattan School of Music, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, National Geographic’s Genographic Project, and Teachers College at Columbia University.

About the Silk Road Project

The Silk Road Project is a nonprofit arts and educational organization with a vision of connecting the world’s neighborhoods by bringing together artists and audiences around the globe. Founded by cellist Yo-Yo Ma in 1998 as a catalyst to promote innovation and learning through the arts, the Silk Road Project takes inspiration from the historic Silk Road trading route as a modern metaphor for multicultural and interdisciplinary exchange. Under the artistic direction of Mr. Ma, the Silk Road Project presents performances by the Silk Road Ensemble, a renowned collective of performers from around the world; engages in cross-cultural exchanges and residencies; leads workshops for students; and partners with leading cultural institutions to create educational materials and programs.

American Museum of Natural History

The American Museum of Natural History is one of the world’s preeminent scientific, educational, and cultural institutions. Since its founding in 1869, the Museum has advanced its global mission to explore and interpret human cultures and the natural world through a wide-reaching program of scientific research, education, and exhibitions. The institution houses 45 permanent exhibition halls, state-of-the-art research laboratories, one of the largest natural history libraries in the Western Hemisphere, and a permanent collection of more than 32 million specimens and cultural artifacts. The Museum shares its treasures and discoveries with approximately four million on-site visitors from around the globe each year. In addition, the Museum’s website, amnh.org, extends its collections, exhibitions, and educational programs to millions more beyond the Museum’s walls.

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