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Rhiannon Giddens Named Artistic Director of Silkroad

Boston, MA — Golnar Khosrowshahi, Chair of the Silkroad Board of Directors, announced today that celebrated singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Rhiannon Giddens has been appointed the next Artistic Director of Silkroad. Her first official appearance will be on Wednesday, July 29, 2020 at 8 p.m. EDT in [Tanglewood's "Recitals from the World Stage."](#)

"On behalf of the Silkroad Board of Directors, we are thrilled to officially welcome Rhiannon Giddens to the Silkroad family," stated Khosrowshahi. "As we look into the future, we feel certain to have found the ideal visionary to enhance Yo-Yo Ma's indelible legacy and lead us to new heights. We greatly admire Rhiannon's innovative spirit and look forward to seeing how she mines American and global traditions to effect an artistic impact that is relevant to our times."

For 20 years Silkroad has embodied radical cultural collaboration, both modeling and teaching the importance of connection across difference. Giddens' incredible mastery at excavating the music of America's past, knowledge of history and diverse cultures, and ability to bring people together from all walks of life, make her perfectly suited for the Artistic Director position.

"Rhiannon is a source of inspiration for all of us," said Kathy Fletcher, Executive Director of Silkroad. "In addition to her enormous musical talent, she fosters an immense social consciousness and creates unity through her art. These are goals for which we consistently strive in our own performances and education initiatives. I am eager to join forces with Rhiannon to expand the social impact mission that is so crucial to Silkroad, as well as to design and present programs that will delight our audiences in the United States and abroad."

Giddens has been a collaborator of Silkroad since 2016, having performed as a special guest with the Silkroad Ensemble and on the Grammy Award-winning album, *Sing Me Home*. Most recently, she was featured in [Home Sessions](#)—a series launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic—alongside Francesco Turrisi. In her new role, Giddens will oversee and conceive artistic programs that support Silkroad’s mission of engaging difference and sparking radical cultural collaboration and passion-driven learning for a more hopeful and inclusive world.

“My keenest desire for Silkroad is a sharpening and reinterpretation of what it means for the ‘right now.’ That it becomes obvious to all that Silkroad is as American as it is possible to get in spirit, even as many of the players are from elsewhere; for what is more American than the gathering of influences from disparate areas of the globe to create something unique and fantastic,” shared Giddens. “I am thankful to the Board, staff, and musicians for this opportunity to magnify the incredible work that they’re doing into an even greater ability to effect change.”

Silkroad founder and acclaimed cellist Yo-Yo Ma expressed his utmost confidence in the leadership transition and excitement for Giddens to make her mark on the organization’s future, while advancing the groundbreaking musical idiom for which Silkroad is known internationally.

“Rhiannon is an extraordinary human being and musician. She lives Silkroad’s values, at once rooted in history and its many musics, and is an advocate for the contemporary voices that can move us to work together for a better world. I look forward to joining Rhiannon and our Silkroad colleagues as we continue this journey together,” affirmed Ma.

Following Yo-Yo Ma’s stewardship of Silkroad from 2000-2017, Nicholas Cords, Jeffrey Beecher, and Shane Shanahan—all long-standing Silkroad artists—led the organization in a co-artistic direction model from 2017-2020 (Beecher from 2017-2019). All three will continue to serve Silkroad as artists and project leaders going forward.

The Artistic Directorship of Silkroad is made possible thanks in part to generous support from the Alice L. Walton Foundation, the Barr Foundation, and Diann H. Kim and John B. Frank.

Giddens’ appearance with Silkroad in [Tanglewood’s “Recitals from the World Stage,”](#) hosted by Karen Allen, will be a virtual concert that celebrates Silkroad’s 20th anniversary at Tanglewood with: two world premieres jointly conceived by Maeve Gilchrist and Kevork Mourad and by Edward Pérez and Kaoru Watanabe; a distanced collaboration by Rhiannon Giddens, Sandeep Das, and Kojiro Umezaki; and archived footage from a 2012 performance at Tanglewood by the Silkroad Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma. The video will be available for five days starting on Wednesday, July 29, 2020 at 8 p.m. EDT and tickets to access it can be purchased at [bso.org](#).

About Rhiannon Giddens

A MacArthur Genius Grant recipient, Rhiannon Giddens is recognized as an accomplished singer, banjoist, and fiddle player. She co-founded the Carolina Chocolate Drops, an old-time string band that received a Grammy Award in 2010. Giddens herself has been Grammy nominated for her solo album, *Tomorrow Is My Turn*, and for her T Bone Burnett-produced EP, *Factory Girl*—which were released on her long-standing label, Nonesuch Records. She also performed for the Obamas at the White House and acted in two seasons of the hit television series, *Nashville*. In her continuous quest to excavate the past to reveal truths about our present, Giddens’ recent projects are steeped in history and bring attention to critical issues in our society. In 2019 she created the group Our Native Daughters, and produced and performed on their album, *Songs of Our Native Daughters*, which tells stories of historic Black womanhood

and survival. That same year, her collaboration with Francesco Turrisi, *there is no Other*, offered at once a condemnation of “othering” and a celebration of the spread of ideas, connectivity, and shared experience. Giddens was recently commissioned to compose an opera based on the autobiography of Omar Ibn Said, an enslaved Muslim-American man who was brought to Charleston in 1807. The work is slated to premiere at the Spoleto Festival USA in 2021.

About Silkroad

Yo-Yo Ma conceived Silkroad in 1998 as a reminder that even as rapid globalization resulted in division, it brought extraordinary possibilities for working together. Seeking to understand this dynamic, he began to learn about the historical Silk Road, recognizing in it a model for radical cultural collaboration, for the exchange of ideas and tradition alongside commerce and innovation. And in an innovative experiment, he brought together musicians from the lands of the Silk Road to co-create a new artistic idiom, a musical language founded in difference, a metaphor for the benefits of a more connected world. This initial gathering of artists was rooted in a simple, initial question: “What happens when strangers meet?” And thus, Silkroad was born, as both a touring ensemble comprised of world-class musicians from all over the globe, and a social impact organization working to make a positive impact across borders through the arts.

Today, Silkroad creates music that engages difference, sparking radical cultural collaboration and passion-driven learning for a more hopeful and inclusive world. Silkroad artists seek and practice this mission in many forms, creating and presenting new music, teacher and musician training workshops, social impact initiatives, and serving as the home for the Grammy Award-winning Silkroad Ensemble. Silkroad has recorded seven albums including *Sing Me Home*, which won the 2016 Grammy for Best World Music Album and was developed and recorded alongside the documentary feature, *The Music of Strangers*, from Oscar-winning director Morgan Neville.

To learn more, please visit silkroad.org on the web and @silkroadproject on social media.

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