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Photos Available

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**FirstWorks Presents The Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma**

*First Performance of North American Tour*

*Friday, March 6, 2009 at Providence Performing Arts Center*

**PROVIDENCE, R.I.** - FirstWorks, a non-profit that connects art with audiences, today announced the March 6, 2009 performance of renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma and his award-winning Silk Road Ensemble. The multicultural collective of virtuoso musicians will present traditional and newly commissioned pieces at the Providence Performing Arts Center in Providence, RI. Tickets are now on sale through the Providence Performing Arts Center box office at 401-421-2787, or [www.ppacri.org](http://www.ppacri.org).

“The performance by the Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma promises to be a magnificent first in the arts, marking FirstWorks’ growth and expansion into year-round programming,” said FirstWorks’ Executive Artistic Director Kathleen Pletcher. “We are delighted to celebrate our fifth year with a once-in-a-lifetime performance by these world-class artists.”

In addition to this performance, the first of the Ensemble’s 2009 North American concert tour, FirstWorks is partnering with the Silk Road Project to engage Rhode Island students in an array of Silk Road-inspired educational programs. The partnership, called “A Season of the Silk Road”, involves over 500 students from Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket and includes work with international artists from the FirstWorks Festival (October 2- November 9, 2008 - [www.first-works.org](http://www.first-works.org)), a study guide prepared by the Silk Road Project and the Stanford Program for International and Cross-Cultural Education for the participating Rhode Island students, and a special lecture-demonstration with Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble on March 4, 2009.

The Silk Road Project, under the direction of Laura Freid, is now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year. The visionary venture continues to explore, absorb and illuminate the many cross-cultural influences that flourished along the ancient trade route between Japan and the Mediterranean Sea for over 2,000 years. “The Silk Road Project hopes to plant seeds of new cultural growth and to celebrate traditions and musical voices everywhere,” said Yo-Yo Ma.

Tickets are now on sale through the Providence Performing Arts Center box office at 401-321-2787, or [www.ppacri.org](http://www.ppacri.org). More information about A Season of the Silk Road can be found at [www.first-works.org](http://www.first-works.org).

### **About FirstWorks**

FirstWorks connects art with audiences through performing arts festivals, youth education and special projects. FirstWorks was launched in 2004 as a vehicle to build community and present extraordinary arts programs that elevate the national profile of Providence, RI. In collaboration with the Providence's Department of Art, Culture & Tourism, FirstWorks has produced eight groundbreaking arts festivals, attracted 55,000 participants, and engaged more than 100 nonprofit community organizations and schools. Visit [www.first-works.org](http://www.first-works.org) to learn more.

### **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. Ma maintains a balance between his engagements as soloist with orchestras worldwide and his recital and chamber music activities. His discography includes more than 75 albums, including 16 Grammy award winners. One of Ma's goals is the investigation of music as a means of communication and as 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. Ma was born in Paris to Chinese parents who later moved the family to New York. He began to study 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 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, 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. Developing new music is a central mission of the Silk Road Project: the Project has been involved in commissioning and performing more than 60 new musical and multimedia works from composers and arrangers from around the world.

### **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.

The March 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 concert is sponsored by Bank of America, TACO/The John & Happy White Foundation, Textron and the City of Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism.

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