For Immediate Release

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Silkroad Receives $3 Million from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The largest gift in the organization’s history will support capacity building around the expansion of its arts and education programs and social impact initiatives

Boston, MA — Silkroad, the non-profit organization founded by celebrated cellist Yo-Yo Ma and home of the Grammy Award-winning Silkroad Ensemble, has been awarded $3 million by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The largest gift in Silkroad’s 21-year history will support a four-year capacity-building effort to expand educational initiatives that are steeped in social justice and equity, and to create new musical projects that connect people and inspire hope. These programs will be fulfilled under the creative leadership of Artistic Director Rhiannon Giddens.

“I am so excited for the opportunity to partner with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and for their trust in our vision,” said Giddens. “This grant is hugely meaningful at a time during which we are focused on re-envisioning Silkroad’s artistic and education programs and growing our social impact work. Thanks to the Foundation, we will be able to realize our ambitious goals and sustain our commitment to social justice and equity through music and arts education.”

The Mellon Foundation’s significant investment will enable the board, artists, and staff to grow Silkroad’s artistic and programmatic output—with an emphasis on new music, art, and education programs that carry relevance and impact for today—in a sustainable way.

Executive Director Kathy Fletcher added, “we firmly believe in the universal, shared humanity that comes through music, and the healing nature that the arts can possess. With this generous grant award, Silkroad is poised to continue breaking down boundaries and accomplishing its mission of connecting people across race, religion, culture, and language.”

The $3 million grant funds will be allocated to build capacity over four years as follows:

- Supporting the artists who create, execute, and lead Silkroad’s programs, including new projects such as: *Home Within* (an artistic response to the Syrian conflict), *Phoenix Rising* (an artistic response to the COVID-19 pandemic), *Powered by Womxn* (an initiative to uplift and empower the voices of womxn), and *The Railroad Project* (a landmark, multi-year effort that will encompass commissions of new music, educational residencies and curriculum development, a new album and multi-part documentary series, a nationwide tour, and community-based events and site-specific visual arts).

- Expanding two flagship education programs: *Global Musician Workshop* and the *Arts and Passion-Driven Learning Institute*, in order to accommodate a greater number of
participants and with the ultimate goal of making these initiatives tuition-free.

- Creating an internship program that provides professional development experiences for emerging administrators and valuable training to the next generation of arts leaders.

- Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) through ongoing anti-racism discovery and training in partnership with Overcoming Racism and Sozo Vision; this work will be facilitated across all areas, including artistic, education, administration, and governance.

- Underwriting compensation for the artistic and administrative staff who are vital to Silkroad’s success, as well as the contractors and firms who complement their efforts.

- Increasing organizational sustainability through a new cash reserve.

“I would like to thank the trustees and staff of the Mellon Foundation for their visionary investment in Silkroad and our important efforts to connect people across cultures by using music and the arts to build bridges toward an equitable, hopeful, and just world,” stated Board of Directors Chair Lori Winters Samuels. “This gift is transformational and will have a profound impact on our work and our mission, enabling us to build capacity across the organization and create incredible artistry and educational programs that deepen and expand our social impact.”

Regarding this milestone moment, founder Yo-Yo Ma shared “the Mellon Foundation’s extraordinary generosity will allow Rhiannon and Silkroad to continue building the creativity, access, and collaboration that we all need to thrive. I can’t wait to join them on the journey.”

About Silkroad

Yo-Yo Ma conceived Silkroad in 1998, recognizing the historical Silk Road as a model for radical cultural collaboration—for the exchange of ideas, tradition, and innovation across borders. In an innovative experiment, he brought together musicians from the lands of the Silk Road to co-create a musical language founded in difference, thus creating the foundation of Silkroad: 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, under the leadership of Artistic Director Rhiannon Giddens, Silkroad leads social impact initiatives and educational programming alongside the creation of new music by the Grammy Award-winning Silkroad Ensemble.

About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation’s largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive.

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