This was a remarkable year of exploration and innovation at Silkroad, led by our ever-inspiring Silk Road Ensemble. From a pop-up concert on the banks of the Bosporus to a weeklong training camp for globally minded musicians in Indiana, from a recording studio in New York City to a classroom in a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan, the Ensemble’s engagement of new communities continues to epitomize our goal of connecting through culture.

This year saw a number of creative efforts that will introduce Silkroad’s work to a much wider audience and help us to reach new communities in the years ahead. The Global Musician Workshop — a phenomenal success — will become an annual event to bring musicians from across the globe together for a week of music making and exchange. In April 2016 we will release our new album, Sing Me Home, featuring many Ensemble members as composers or arrangers collaborating with an array of exceptional guest artists. The music explores our ideas of home – where we find it, how we leave it, and how we return. Together the pieces embody a remarkable breadth of cultural tradition, from Irish fiddle and Indian sitar to Malian kora and Balkan folk singing.

And in June 2016, the long-awaited documentary The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble, directed by Oscar-winning filmmaker Morgan Neville, will give new friends an inside look at Ensemble members’ stories as performers, explorers, and cultural citizens.

Meanwhile, we carry on our work as musicians, composers, educators, and cultural entrepreneurs. And our enduring relationship with Harvard continues to grow; we are collaborating with students and faculty, hosting an institute for teachers and teaching artists, and stretching the boundaries between disciplines to inspire innovation at the edge of culture and business.

As we conclude our 15th anniversary celebrations, we deeply appreciate our friends — old and new — who believe in the power of the arts to connect the world. On behalf of all of us at Silkroad, thank you for your support.

Yo-Yo Ma

"AT SILKROAD, OUR VISION IS TO BE A CATALYST FOR CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP — TO MODEL THE WAYS THAT CULTURE CAN BE A FORCE FOR POSITIVE CHANGE. MAYBE WE ALL WANT TO HELP OTHERS TAP INTO THIS TRANSFORMATIVE POWER."

Yo-Yo Ma
“WE STARTED WITH THIS RUBRIC OF THE SILK ROAD TRADING ROUTE, BUT OVER 15 YEARS, IT REALLY HAS BECOME MORE ABOUT EXPLORING THE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THIS GROUP AND WHAT MAKES PEOPLE TICK, MUSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND THEN TRYING TO FIND AN OUTLET FOR THAT ON STAGE.”

Nick Cords

The Silk Road Ensemble is constantly evolving as our musicians learn from one another, take risks, and explore new possibilities. “The musicians played with vitality and a fiery display of virtuosity.”

Boston Classical Review

While touring three continents — Europe, Asia, and North America — the Ensemble premiered pieces written or arranged by Silkroad artists, including Haruka Fujii’s fresh take on Japanese folk tunes, “Shingashi Song;” and Kayhan Kalhor’s haunting Kurdish ballad, “Layers of Loneliness;” and Wu Man’s arrangement of the popular 20th-century Chinese instrumental work, “Yao Dance.” As artists-in-residence at Harvard, Ensemble members deepened their work with the community, mentoring student musicians and inviting them to share the stage in concert at Sanders Theater.

“Music as a field is as big as the world,” observed Alan Gilbert, music director of the New York Philharmonic, reflecting on performing with the Silk Road Ensemble in April 2015. Indeed, the Ensemble’s work extends well beyond the concert hall, from conducting workshops on music as storytelling at the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto to encouraging sixth-grade performers at JHS 185 in Queens, brainstorming about cultural navigation with Harvard faculty and students, and exchanging melodies with middle schoolers on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Montana. The Ensemble’s storytelling musicians embody boundless curiosity and generosity, helping them to connect with communities wherever they go.

FY15 IMPACT IN NUMBERS

51,710 individuals experienced the Silk Road Ensemble live in concert

33 musicians from 16 countries co-created art, performance, and ideas

29 new musical works or arrangements were developed, including 18 pieces for a new PBS series and 9 for our new album

6 new musical works or arrangements had world premieres

31 performances connected artists and audiences in 14 international cities and 12 U.S. cities.

One figure equals 500 audience members
“I DON’T THINK THE DIFFERENCE OF INSTRUMENTS IS WHAT MATTERS. I THINK WHAT MATTERS IS HOW PEOPLE USE THEIR INSTRUMENTS.”

Kinan Azmeh

This year marked the completion and release for the film of The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble, directed by Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker Morgan Neville (20 Feet from Stardom).

“If only the spirit of artistic sharing and peaceful coexistence the Silk Road Ensemble radiates so beautifully through its playing were somehow to permeate the trouble spots of today’s world, what a different, and better, planet it would be.”

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Production spanned the globe, from New York and Los Angeles to Galicia, Jordan, and beyond. Through a combination of personal stories and performance footage, the film, to be released June, 2016, will acquaint new audiences around the world with the Ensemble and explore the ways music and art can inspire hope, empathy, and imagination.

At Silkroad, we are always looking for new ways to give friends and audiences an in-depth look at the stories behind our work, and The Music of Strangers offers one window into the intense curiosity that drives the artists in the Ensemble. This year, we also created a new video series — “Origin Stories” — starting with Kinan Azmeh’s “Wedding,” as a way to explore the creative process and share the values behind the Ensemble’s music.

11 film shoots took place in Canada, Jordan, Turkey, Spain, and the U.S.
"THE ARTS TEACH US THAT THERE IS SOMETHING THAT CONNECTS US ALL AND IS BIGGER THAN EACH OF US."

Yo-Yo Ma

How does learning through and with the arts inspire passion and curiosity in learning? That question is central to all of our endeavors. "Passion-driven learning is learning motivated by insatiable curiosity and a desire to make sense of the world."

STEVE SEIDEL, FACULTY DIRECTOR, ARTS IN EDUCATION PROGRAM, HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

This year, Mike Block, a multi-style cellist, Silk Road Ensemble member, and entrepreneur, accepted Yo-Yo’s challenge to design and direct a week-long intensive training workshop for musicians interested in learning from one another’s traditions. Musicians from across the country and around the world joined an all-star faculty representing a range of backgrounds and cultures to take part in Silkroad’s first Global Musician Workshop.

320 elementary and middle school students in Queens, NY, Lame Deer, MT, and Des Moines, IA learned with us through the arts

11 performing artists met with students over the course of 8 teaching artist visits and residencies

1,979 participants — school-aged through college — took part in 10 workshops during Silk Road Ensemble tours

$19,650 in financial aid helped 31 educators and teaching artists attend our Arts and Passion-Driven Learning Institute

104 educators from 20 U.S. states and 13 countries joined us for the Arts and Passion-Driven Learning Institute

50 contact hours in which our teachers led hands-on learning experiences

21 hours of professional development enriched educators’ experiences

91 participants from 23 U.S. states and 10 countries representing 33 different instruments joined us for our first Global Musician Workshop

This kind of intensive exploration amplified the approaches to education we have developed in our annual Arts and Passion-Driven Learning Institute, which we hosted for the third time this year. We continued this work with a panel on cultural navigation at the Radcliffe Institute, a professional development workshop at the Boston Arts Academy, a teaching artist residency at our Turnaround Arts school in Des Moines, IA, and an ongoing engagement with middle school students in Queens, NY, and Lame Deer, MT.

"Passion-driven learning is learning motivated by insatiable curiosity and a desire to make sense of the world."

Steve Seidel
The arts need business and business needs the arts. And if ideas become reality where creativity and innovation meet, then bringing together artists and entrepreneurs has tremendous potential. Today more than ever, artists and entrepreneurs are seeing the benefits of joining their expertise to achieve sustainability and deepen their impact.

This year, Silkroad continued exploring the emerging practice of cultural entrepreneurship. In partnership with Harvard Business School and Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences, we co-sponsored the third annual Deans’ Cultural Entrepreneurship Challenge, in which cross-disciplinary teams of students compete for seed money to further innovative artistic projects. Just as Ensemble members have explored unique paths in their own careers, so far over 700 students have immersed themselves in creative proposals, and we are delighted to see several ventures from previous years’ challenges succeeding in the marketplace.

$55,000 was awarded to three finalist teams to support new cultural ventures. The arts cannot be sustained without business. Business cannot be sustained without creativity. So putting these two things together in ways where that creative tension benefits each sector, I think, has enormous potential.”

IT HAS BEEN A JOY TO JOIN SILKROAD IN BRINGING ART AND LEARNING TO NEW COMMUNITIES FROM ISTANBUL TO TORONTO, MY HOME TOWN.

This year, we invested in a series of activities that will transform through the arts. The following foundations who share our vision of a world deepened our impact and engaged new communities on a far greater scale than is possible through live performances.

We completed filming documentary film and recording a new album, both of which will connect us with new audiences around the world, while the Global Musician Workshop gives us a new platform to inspire future generations of citizen-artists.

As always, concert tours were an important feature of the year's activities and we performed for more than 50,000 people.

We are fortunate to have many generous friends who support our mission including our corporate sponsor, Hyosung Corporation. Contributions from individuals continue to be our largest source of support, and we are honored to recognize the donors who make our work possible.

More than 85% of our revenues went to direct program costs, with the remaining 15% allocated to overhead and fundraising expenses. Our financial statements reflect the financial condition and performance of the organization in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

Please visit our website to download full audited financial statements.