



**For Release: For Immediate Release**

January 13, 2009

Photos Available

Contact: Meredith Cutler, 401-421-4278  
communications@first-works.org

**FirstWorks Announces Programs With The Silk Road Project**  
*The Season of the Silk Road Begins*

**PROVIDENCE, R.I.** – FirstWorks today announced a schedule of ambitious programs in Rhode Island with the Silk Road Project, a visionary artistic and educational organization led by renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma. The programs include a series of workshops for high school students with members of the Silk Road Ensemble, leading up to a March 6, 2009, public concert by the Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma at the Providence Performing Arts Center. Made possible by FirstWorks, these events are being held in conjunction with the Silk Road Ensemble’s spring 2009 residency at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), part of a multi-year affiliation. Together, the partnership with RISD and programs with FirstWorks this spring are extending activities with the Silk Road Project to the greater Rhode Island community to an unprecedented degree.

“This nationally significant program marks an expansion for FirstWorks, launching our new, year-round schedule of connecting art with audiences,” said Kathleen Pletcher, FirstWorks Executive Artistic Director. “Since the beginning of our multi-year partnership with Providence’s Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, FirstWorks has presented performing arts festivals, youth education and special projects. Now we will bring the power of firsts in the arts to the community throughout the year and further our mission to build deep local engagement.”

The March 6, 2009, performance by the Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma will kick off the Silk Road Ensemble’s North American tour, a series of concerts of music ranging from traditional to newly composed pieces performed by this multicultural collective of virtuoso

-more-

musicians. The concert features the U.S. premiere of the Silk Road Ensemble's *Layla and Majnun*, a new multimedia chamber arrangement of an opera by composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov. First staged in Azerbaijan in 1908, *Layla and Majnun* is based on a classic Arabian love story known and beloved throughout Central Asia. Similar in some respects to *Romeo and Juliet*, the original story dates back to the seventh century and has been interpreted by poets such as Nezami and Fuzuli. Sets for this production were designed by recent RISD graduate Henrik Söderström [RISD Furniture Design 2008], who returns to RISD for a week-long artist residency and exhibition (March 4-11).

The March 6 concert will take place 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).

“Because the Silk Road Ensemble draws its exceptional performers from cities and towns the world over, the Silk Road Project is in many ways a uniquely global cultural organization,” said Laura Freid, Silk Road Project Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director. “However, our office has been based here in Providence since 2005, when we entered into our affiliation with RISD, and over the past several years this local partnership has engaged students and faculty providing wonderful opportunities for creative exchanges and artistic development. This year we are pleased to collaborate with both RISD and FirstWorks on educational programs and performances that will broaden our reach to the greater Rhode Island community.”

Prior to the concert, the educational initiative will engage 500 students from Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket in an inspirational, cross-cultural curriculum inspired by the ancient Silk Road trade routes. Key initiative milestones include:

January 7: FirstWorks introduced the “Along the Silk Road” study guide to Rhode Island teachers.

January 14 and 22: Members of Angkor Dance Troupe will visit participating high school classes for Cambodian dance workshops.

-more-

January 26-27: Silk Road Ensemble member Yang Wei will visit participating high school classes for special music workshops.

March 4: The Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma will present an interactive "Music of the Silk Road" workshop for participating middle and high school classes at the RISD Auditorium from 12:30-1:30PM.

Participating schools are:

- Beacon Charter High School for the Arts, Woonsocket
- JMW School for the Performing and Visual Arts, Pawtucket
- Central Falls High School, Central Falls
- Hope High School, Providence
- Textron/Chamber of Commerce Providence Public Charter School, Providence
- Gilbert Stuart Middle School with Providence After School Alliance (PASA)

Further details on the full roster of "Season of the Silk Road" educational workshops will be announced in coming weeks.

To celebrate a "Season of the Silk Road" with Providence tourism partners, FirstWorks and the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau will launch a "First Course with FirstWorks" special restaurant promotion. "First Course with FirstWorks" will begin on Sunday, March 1 and run through Friday, March 6. Details about special offers and participating restaurants will be announced.

### **About FirstWorks**

As a model private/public partnership with the City of Providence's Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, FirstWorks was launched as a vehicle to build community, reach underserved audiences, and present extraordinary arts programs that elevate Providence's national profile

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 the Silk Road Project & the Silk Road Ensemble**

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.

The Silk Road Ensemble is a collective of approximately 60 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.

## **About Rhode Island School of Design (RISD)**

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) has earned a worldwide reputation as the preeminent art and design college in the country. Today, with more than 22,000 alumni, the college enrolls roughly 2,000 undergraduates and 400 graduate students from the United States and almost 50 countries, offering degree programs in the fine arts, architecture, and design disciplines, and art education. Academic programs include research and design initiatives, the exploration of art criticism and contemporary cultural concerns, as well as international exchange programs. Each year, RISD hosts prominent and accomplished artists, critics, and authors to its campus. Included within the college is The RISD Museum of Art, which houses a world-class collection of art objects from Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome and art of all periods from Asia, Europe and the Americas, as well as the latest in contemporary art. For more information go to [www.risd.edu](http://www.risd.edu) or [our.risd.edu](http://our.risd.edu).

The March 6, 2009 concert is sponsored by U.S. Trust / Bank of America Private Wealth Management, TACO/The John & Happy White Foundation, Textron and the City of Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism.

###