

The Silk Road Project
at Cal Performances is presented by
United Commercial Bank

Silk Road Ensemble

Sunday, April 28, 2002, 3 pm
Hertz Hall

PROGRAM

Traditional Music pipa
(China)

Jia da Qun The Prospect of Colored Desert (2000)*
(China) sheng, pipa, cello, percussion

Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky Night Music: Voices in the Leaves (2000)*
(Uzbekistan) conductor, violin, viola, cello, bass, flute,
clarinet, piano, harp, percussion, prerecorded
tape

INTERMISSION

Traditional Music kemancheh, santur, ney
(Iran)

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh Dervish (2000)*
(Azerbaijan) conductor, voice, tutek, qanun, violin,
viola, cello, gosha nagara

A roster of Silk Road Ensemble musicians is located on p. 13.

* Commissioned by the Silk Road Project, Inc.

Produced in association with ICM Artists, Ltd., and the Silk Road Project, Inc.

The Silk Road Project, Inc., acknowledges the following generous support:
The Aga Khan Trust for Culture is the Lead Funder and a Key Creative Partner;
Ford Motor Company and Siemens are the Global Corporate Partners;
Sony Classical is the Founding Supporter.

Major funding:
The Starr Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Henry R. Kravis, Richard Li, William Rondina

Major funding for the Silk Road Project at Cal Performances provided by:
The Ford Foundation, Greg & Liz Lutz, National Endowment for the Arts, The Bernard Osher Foundation, Nadine M. Tang
& Bruce L. Smith

Cal Performances' education and community programs for the Silk Road Project are made possible by Ford Motor Company.

Seven hundred years after Marco Polo, the Silk Road still evokes a nebulous geography that, like an ancient mariner's map, stretches between reality and fantasy. Indeed, these days the Silk Road is no less a product of imagination and metaphor than a legacy of actual historical events, and this very hybridity is what has made it such an enduring symbol of cultural discovery and exchange.

Both the symbolism and the reality of the Silk Road attracted Yo-Yo Ma, who created the Silk Road Project as a way to study the global circulation of music and musical ideas. One of the Project's first activities was a program to commission composers to write chamber music works that evoke the spirit of East-West cultural exchange symbolized by the Silk Road. Thus far, composers from the lands of the Silk Road—including China, Mongolia, Korea, Armenia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan—have completed their commissions, and three of these works appear on today's program: *The Prospect of Colored Desert* by Chinese composer Jia Da Qun, *Night Music: Voices in the Leaves* by Dmitry Yanov-Yanovsky from Uzbekistan, and *Dervish* by Franghiz Ali-Zadeh from Azerbaijan. Traditional music is also featured on the program, with virtuoso string performances by Wu Man playing the Chinese pipa and Kayhan Kalhor playing the Persian kemancheh.

• • •

Wu Man, one of the most outstanding pipa virtuosos today, symbolizes a new generation of musicians from the Silk Road diaspora who are dismantling the boundaries between indigenous and imported music. Her mastery of the pipa, a Chinese lute with a history of more than 2,000 years, has won her audiences around the world through her performances at Carnegie Hall, the White House, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and Royal Albert Hall, among other major venues. Equally adept at performing court music from 8th-century China and improvising with jazz musicians in the downtown clubs of New York and Hong Kong, Wu Man has been recognized as one of the most versatile performers of Chinese traditional music of her generation. After receiving her degree at Central Conservatory in Beijing, Wu Man immigrated to the United States, where she became an advocate for Chinese traditional music as well as new contemporary works for the pipa. Historically, this four-stringed lute was strung with silk strings and played by horseback-riding "barbarians," according to early Chinese sources. Today's instrument has nylon strings and requires intricate preparation on the part of the performer, including taping plastic fingernails to each finger to substitute for the unimaginably long fingernails sported by players of earlier times.

• • •

Born in Sichuan, China, the composer Jia Da Qun (b. 1955) imbues his compositions with a painterly aesthetic. Following eight years of study as a painter at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Jia Da Qun abandoned a career in the visual arts when his vision became impaired. Undeterred, he determined that he would devote his attention to composition—a passion he had been developing while in art school. As a professor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and a respected composer of contemporary music, he has imported the principles of form, line, and color from Chinese calligraphy and painting into his compositions and teachings. In *Prospect of Colored Desert*, the composer imagines a black ink brush painting of a desert. In this work, the sheng, a 3,000-year-old Chinese wind instrument made from bamboo and bronze pipes whose sound was said to imitate the distinctive call of the phoenix flying over the ancient Chinese forests, complements the cello, violin, pipa (Chinese short-necked lute), and Western percussion. Chinese opera also influenced the composer. In this work, one can almost hear the instruments acting out their operatic assignments. On percussion, we can imagine a tiger pouncing in the forest, while the hairpin turns, slides, and flourishes of the violin and cello mimic the fiery antics of the sheng and pipa—which carry the lead roles in this melodrama.

• • •

One of the strongest and most influential voices to have emerged from the former Soviet republics in recent years belongs to Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky (b. 1963), a Russian Jewish composer who grew up and still lives in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. In addition to studying composition at the Tashkent State Conservatory, Yanov-Yanovsky devoted several years to the mastery of the chang, a small Central Asian struck zither for which he wrote a series of five pieces. *Night Music: Voices in the Leaves*, commissioned by the Silk Road Project, is a piece that bridges East and West on multiple levels. The title of the piece is itself full of meaning. "Night music" is a reference to earlier works by Elliott Carter and Béla Bartók, both of whom were important musical influences, and "voices in the leaves" comes from T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets," as well as from a line in the famous medieval Central Asian poem "Language of the Birds" by Alisher

Nawâ'i. In *Night Music*, the composer

intentionally refrains from using Asian instruments. Instead, he uses Western instruments to evoke their timbres and textures; for example, he uses the harp to evoke the sound of the *chang*. A critical component of the piece is a recording of taped voices performing an Uzbek lullaby that floats over a lush complement of Western strings.

• • •

Born in Tehran, Kayhan Kalhor (b. 1963) studied classical violin at age six but found his own musical voice in its Persian analog, the *kemancheh* (Persian spike fiddle). As Kalhor explained, “perhaps it is because Farsi is written from right to left, but I always thought playing arpeggios on the piano from left to right was counterintuitive. The violin, which is played on a horizontal axis, was also a challenge, but the *kemancheh* with its vertical axis—this felt completely natural.” A passionate advocate for these traditions, Kalhor spends half his year teaching the *radif* of Persian classical music (a highly sophisticated series of melodic modes or *dastgahs* that are divided further into intricate submodes or *gushehs*) to conservatory-trained students in Teheran. The *radif* exists in several canonical versions, each the basis of a school of performance. Explains Kalhor, “It is a misunderstanding that Persian classical music is the same as Arab music. At the height of the Persian Empire, the music, poetry, and literature of Persia spread to India, Central Asia, Turkey, the Mediterranean, and North Africa. Persian music can still be heard today in the music of Andalusia and the Spanish flamenco.”

• • •

Azerbaijani composer and concert pianist Franghiz Ali-Zadeh (b. 1947) received her doctorate in musicology from Baku Conservatory and exemplifies the challenge of forging a bicultural career. As Ali-Zadeh explains, “After I completed my formal studies at the Conservatory, it was as if there had been some sort of misunderstanding. While I had studied Western music by day, I would come home every night to listen to a very different kind of music—the *mugham* (a complex collection of modally based suites based upon traditional models).” Inspired by the rhythmic similarities between the musical liturgy of Sufism (a form of mystical Islam) and *mugham*, Ali-Zadeh recorded an authentic dervish in her native Baku as part of her research for a new Silk Road Project commission. The following text emphasizes the dervish’s ecstatic devotion to faith and truthseeking, and is based on the life of the martyred 14th-century poet Nasimi, who was skinned alive for his Sufi beliefs. Ali-Zadeh artfully couples the rapturous musings of the dervish (performed here by legendary Azerbaijani bard Alim Qasimov) with a sextet of traditional Azerbaijani and Western instruments, including the *tutek* (wooden flute), *qanun* (plucked zither), *gosha nagara* (kettle drums), and Western string trio. In so doing, she creates a unique contemporary musical language that evokes the traditional rhythms and harmonies of the *mugham*.

I am a dervish, it is strange;
I have nothing, but I am the king
of the universe;
I am invisible, my body is transparent;
When I am in a good temper, my spirit begins to shine;
I am nowhere and I am everywhere;
I combine all forces of nature: fire,
water, air, earth.

I am a messenger;
I was sent here by God and he speaks through me;
I am beyond the law of the common people;
I will not be dismayed if they do not let me into Paradise,
Because Paradise is within me;
Eh Nasimi! It is you who were chosen
by God.

As a metaphor for cultural exchange, the Silk Road might at first suggest linear connections between East and West. Yet the works and lives of the composers represented in tonight’s program demonstrate that the process of cross-cultural innovation is exquisitely circuitous. Yo-Yo Ma and his colleagues in the Silk Road Project aim to illuminate both the diversity and the unifying elements of this process. Said Ma, “As we interact with unfamiliar musical traditions, we encounter voices that are not exclusive to one community. We discover trans-national voices that belong to one world.”

—Esther Won

Background on the artists and the Silk Road Project is located on p. 7.