Yo Yo Ma

Cellist

Yo-Yo Ma's multi-faceted career is testament to his enduring belief in culture’s power to generate trust and understanding. Whether performing new or familiar works from the cello repertoire, collaborating with communities and institutions to explore culture’s social impact, or engaging unexpected musical forms, Mr. Ma strives to foster connections that stimulate the imagination and reinforce our humanity.

With partners from around the world and across disciplines, Mr. Ma creates programs that stretch the boundaries of genre and tradition to explore music-making as a means not only to share and express meaning, but also as a model for the cultural collaboration he considers essential to a strong society. Expanding upon this belief, in 1998 Mr. Ma established Silkroad, a collective of artists from around the world who create music that engages their many traditions. In addition to presenting performances in venues from Suntory Hall to the Hollywood Bowl, Silkroad collaborates with museums and universities to develop training programs for teachers, musicians, and learners of all ages.

In addition to his work as a performing artist, Mr. Ma partners with communities and institutions from Chicago to Guangzhou to develop programs that champion culture’s power to transform lives and forge a more connected world. Among his many roles, he is the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant; artistic advisor at large to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; artistic director of the annual Youth Music Culture Guangdong festival; and UN Messenger of Peace. He is the first artist ever appointed to the World Economic Forum’s board of trustees.

Yo-Yo Ma was born in 1955 to Chinese parents living in Paris. He began to study the cello with his father at age four and three years later moved with his family to New York City, where he continued his cello studies with Leonard Rose at the Juilliard School. After his conservatory training, he sought out a liberal arts education, graduating from Harvard University with a degree in anthropology in 1976. He has performed for eight American presidents, most recently at the invitation of President Obama on the occasion of the 56th Inaugural Ceremony.