

UGA
presents.

24|25 SEASON

**SILKROAD ENSEMBLE
WITH RHIANNON GIDDENS**
American Railroad

SUN, NOV 17, 7:00 pm

Hodgson Concert Hall



Ebru Yildiz

Supported by
CATHERINE B. KLEINER

Please silence all mobile phones and electronic devices. Photography, video and audio recording, and texting are prohibited during the performance.



SILKROAD ENSEMBLE

RHIANNON GIDDENS, voice, banjo, fiddle

BALLA KOUYATÉ, balafon

EDWARD PÉREZ, bass

FRANCESCO TURRISI, frame drums, accordion

KAORU WATANABE, Japanese flutes, Japanese percussion

LAYALE CHAKER, violin

MAEVE GILCHRIST, Celtic harp

MARIO GOTOH, violin, viola

MIKE BLOCK, cello

PURA FÉ, voice, lap-steel guitar

SANDEEP DAS, tabla

SHANE SHANAHAN, percussion

YAZHI GUO, suona, Chinese percussion



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

RHIANNON GIDDENS

Voice, Banjo, Fiddle

Rhiannon Giddens has made a singular, iconic career out of stretching her brand of folk music, with its miles-deep historical roots and contemporary sensibilities, into just about every field imaginable. A two-time GRAMMY Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning singer and instrumentalist, MacArthur “Genius” grant recipient, and composer of opera, ballet, and film, Giddens has centered her work around the mission of lifting people up whose contributions to American musical history have previously been overlooked or erased, and advocating for a more accurate understanding of the country’s musical origins through art.

As Pitchfork once said, “few artists are so fearless and so ravenous in their exploration” —a journey that has led to NPR naming her one of its 25 Most Influential Women Musicians of the 21st Century and to American Songwriter calling her “one of the most important musical minds currently walking the planet.”

BALLA KOUYATÉ

Balafon

To say that Balla Kouyaté was born into a musical family is an understatement. His family lineage goes back over 800 years to Balla Faséké, the first of an unbroken line of djelis in the Kouyaté clan. Djelis are the oral historians, musicians, and performers who keep alive and celebrate the history of the Mandé people of Mali, Guinea, and other West African countries. Balla explains that the word “Djeli” derives from his Mandinka language, “It means blood and speaks to the central role we play in our society.” One must be born into it.

The Kouyaté family is regarded as the original praise-singers of the Malinké people, one of the ethnic groups found across much of West Africa. In 2001, the “Sosso bala” was declared a site of intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO. This powerful symbol of Mande culture is brought out once a year for ceremonial playing. Balla also regularly plays with world renowned West African musicians who are touring in the States. He often accompanies kora master Mamadou Diabaté, and in 2004 joined NEA National Heritage Fellow Sidiki Cond Kouyaté for a month-long residency at Carnegie Hall.

In 2010, Balla Kouyaté was awarded a Mass Cultural Council Fellowship in the Traditional Arts. In 2014, Balla and his son Sekou were awarded a Mass Cultural Council Traditional Arts Apprenticeship, helping to ensure the continuance of this hereditary art. Balla’s dedication to carrying on his family’s hereditary role as a Djeli, his musical virtuosity, and his humility truly set him apart from others. He is an exemplar of the kind of traditional artist the National Heritage Fellowships were established to recognize.

EDWARD PÉREZ

Bass

Bassist, composer, and Grammy-nominated bandleader Edward Pérez resides in the cultural crossroads of Queens, New York, where he maintains musical collaborations in a myriad of styles. The early years of Pérez's career included stints in Boston and Lima, Peru, where he began his formation in jazz, Latin jazz, and Afro-Peruvian styles. Since arriving in New York in 2005, Pérez has toured throughout the world, performing in more than twenty countries for acclaimed bandleaders in jazz such as Paquito D'Rivera, Ralph Peterson Jr, Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra and Ignacio Berroa and even sharing the stage with jazz luminaries such as Lee Konitz, Kenny Werner, Lionel Loueke, Mark Turner, and Seamus Blake. His own project, Terraza Big Band, received a Grammy nomination in the large ensemble category for their debut recording "One Day Wonder," featuring compositions by Pérez as well as co-leader Michael Thomas. Pérez's numerous recording credits as a sideman include three Latin Grammy nominated recordings and as well as another Grammy nod in the Latin jazz category.

Edward Pérez's wide-ranging musical curiosity has led him to explore a myriad of styles, performing with renowned artists from a host of styles such as Lebanese oud master Marcel Khalife, flamenco phenom Diego Amador, Colombian singer Lucia Pulido, and Galician gaita powerhouse Cristina Pato. Owing to the lasting influence of his years in Lima, he has performed with many of the greats of Afro-Peruvian music, including Oscar Avilés, Julio "Chocolate" Algendones, Juan Medrano Cotito, and Grammy winner Eva Ayllón. Pérez currently maintains his own project in the Afro-Peruvian genre, Festejation, a band which tours throughout the northeastern United States. Currently a member of Silkroad, Pérez regularly collaborates with other members of the collective and has even shared the stage with its founder, Yo-Yo Ma, performing Pérez's own compositions in David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center. Just as Pérez's performance career is not limited to jazz, his compositions and arrangements in a wide variety of styles have been performed in venues such as The Kennedy Center, Massey Hall, Chicago Symphony Center, El Gran Teatro Nacional de Lima, Damascus Opera House, and Boston Symphony Hall.

FRANCESCO TURRISI

Frame Drums, Accordion

Francesco Turrisi has been defined as a "musical alchemist" and a "musical polyglot." He has released five critically acclaimed albums as a leader and two as co-leader ("Tarab," a cross boundary innovative ensemble that blends Irish and Mediterranean traditional music, and "Zahr," a project that looks at connections between southern Italian traditional music and Arabic music).

KAORU WATANABE

Japanese Flutes, Japanese Percussion

Acclaimed composer and instrumentalist Kaoru Watanabe's melodic, authentic and engaging music focuses on points of connection: the joints between Western jazz and Japanese theater and folk traditions and political action, the ancient

and the all-too-contemporary. Born into a musical family, Watanabe began his training at a young age, eventually graduating from the Manhattan School of Music, then devoting a decade overseas performing with and ultimately leading the world-renowned Taiko drum performance group Kodo. His ten years in Japan profoundly influenced Watanabe's practice. His signature skill of infusing Japanese culture to disparate styles has made him a much-in-demand collaborator, having worked with Wes Anderson, Yo-Yo Ma, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Laurie Anderson, Jason and Alicia Hall Moran, Bando Tamasaburo, Eva Yerbabuena, and Zakir Hussain, among many others. Whether writing for solo performances, interdisciplinary ensembles, film, or symphony orchestras, he regularly explores social justice, history, and heritage issues.

LAYALE CHAKER

Violin

Raised on the verge of several musical streams since her childhood, Lebanese violinist and composer Layale Chaker debuted her musical training at the National Higher Conservatory of Beirut in her native Lebanon. She later pursued her musical studies at Conservatoire de Paris and the Royal Academy of Music in London, and is currently working towards her doctoral degree at Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris. She has studied under professors such as Mohamed Hashem, Carmen Scricariu, Jeanne-Marie Conquer and Nicholas Miller.

Layale has appeared as a soloist, performer, improviser and composer in concerts, recitals and projects around Europe, the Middle East, North and South America and Asia, with collaborations and commissions with Oxford Orchestra, West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, Holland Baroque, Babylon Orchestra, Avignon Festival, Lucerne Festival, National Sawdust, London Jazz Festival, Wigmore Hall, and New World Symphony among others.

She is also the founder and leader of Sarafand, with whom she has released the album *Inner Rhyme* that received features in the New York Times, The Strad, Songlines as Top of The World in March 2019 with a 5-star review, NPR'S #2 of 10 Best Releases of January 2019, and was #1 for weeks on the World Charts of iTunes and Amazon Music. Layale is a Ruth Anderson 2017 Competition Prize winner, the recipient of the Royal Academy of Music's 2018 Guinness Award and the Nadia & Lili Boulanger 2019 Scheme, and a finalist of the Rolex Mentor and Protégé 2018 Prize.

MAEVE GILCHRIST

Celtic Harp

Edinburgh born harpist and composer Maeve Gilchrist has been credited as an innovator on her native instrument and taken the Celtic (Ilever) Harp to new levels of performance and visibility. Currently based in Kingston, NY, Maeve tours internationally as a solo artist and composer as well as being a member of the grammy-nominated Silkroad ensemble, Arooj Aftab's Grammy winning Vulture Prince Ensemble and as part of the multi-disciplinary quartet Edges of Light. She has performed and recorded with such luminaries as Yo-Yo Ma, Frankie Gavin, Esperanza Spalding, Bruce Molsky, Ambrose Akinmusire and Solas.



Noir Prism

As a composer, Maeve straddles the worlds of folk and classical with pieces including her original concerto for symphony orchestra and harp (a co-commission with Luke Benton), a three-movement Samuel Beckett-inspired piece for harp, string quartet and sound samples which was premiered at the Edinburgh International Harp Festival in the spring of 2018, and a number of other pieces for harp ensembles and strings. She is a regular visiting artist at the Berklee College of Music and has had a number of instructional books published by Hal Leonard and 80 Days Publishing. Maeve has released a number of albums to her name on the Adventure Music Record Label as well as being a featured soloist on the Dreamworks blockbuster movie soundtrack, *How to Tame your Dragon: The Hidden World*. Her most recent album, *The Harpweaver*, has garnered international acclaim including a five-star review from the *Irish Times* which described it as “buoyant, sprightly and utterly beguiling ... a snapshot of a musician at the top of her game.”

Maeve is the co-music director of the WGBH holiday show, A Christmas Celtic Sojourn, and the co-artistic director of the brand new Rockport Celtic Music festival; an innovative new festival focused on cross-curation and the outer fringes of Celtic music.

MARIO GOTOH

Violin, Viola

“Stunning, magical, unique...”—Time Out NY

“I’ll be thinking about my one-to-one concert with Mario Gotoh for a long time to come.”—NPR All Things Considered

Born in Japan, based in NYC, Dr. Mario Gotoh is a Grammy award winner who has distinguished herself in multiple roles as an innovative, creative violinist, violist, passionate educator and composer with a remarkably unique style in all genres, performing worldwide. An avid interdisciplinary collaborator, Mario is a featured actor in William Kentridge’s *The Head & The Load*. She regularly records and performs on soundtracks and with pop artists including Stevie Wonder, Brian Wilson, Roger Waters, Sting, Katy Perry, and Doja Cat, and has been broadcast on The Grammys, SNL, MTV VMAs, Colbert and Letterman. She was the original

violinist-violist for Broadway’s *Hamilton: An American Musical*. She holds dual-degree Doctorates and Masters of both Violin and Viola Performance. Mario is inspired by her community activism, language, literature, cooking, writing, visual arts, film, swimming, and exploring cultures worldwide.

MIKE BLOCK

Cello

Mike Block is a pioneering cello player, singer, composer, and educator passionate about cross-cultural collaboration through music. Acclaimed by the *New York Times* for his “vital rich-hued solo playing,” and by *Salt Lake City Desert News* as “a true artist ... a sight to behold,” Mike Block “is one of the bravest, most intriguing musicians on the American fusion scene.” (*Gramophone*). Mike’s performances offer a rich mixture of classical repertoire, folk music, original compositions, and songs. Since 2005, Mike has been a member of the Silkroad Ensemble, with which he has been featured as both cello and vocal soloist, contributed arrangements and compositions, and earned a Grammy Award in 2017 for their album *Sing Me Home*.

Mike is among the first wave of cellists to adopt a strap to stand and move while performing. Using his patented design, The Block Strap. Mike was the first standing cellist to perform at Carnegie Hall, which the *New York Times* characterized as “breathless ... half dance, half dare.” In 2020, Mike founded Play For The Vote, which organizes musical performances at polling locations across the country on Election Day, with the goal of increasing voter turnout by providing a more positive voting experience. As an educator, he is the founder/director of two summer programs: the Mike Block String Camp, as well as Silkroad’s Global Musician Workshop. Mike teaches online through his Multi-Style Cello School at ArtistWorks.com, and is on the faculty at The New England Conservatory.

PURA FÉ

Lap-Steel Guitar, Voice

Pura Fé (Tuscarora/Taino) is an indigenous activist, singer-songwriter, and storyteller known for her distinct, soulful vocals and for breathing life into several musical genres. Her work as a musician has brought her around the world to do work at festivals, benefits in classrooms, online, and in the studio. As a native activist and cultural leader, she has done work to combat the erasure of native culture, restore traditions, build community, fight corporate takeover of native land, and give a voice to those facing social injustice. As the founding member of the internationally renowned Native Women’s a cappella trio Ulali, Pura Fé helped to create a movement throughout Indian Country, which not only empowered Native Women’s hand drum and harmony, but also built a bridge for Native music into the mainstream music scene.

Pura Fé’s solo career has produced six studio albums with her Native Blues and lap-steel slide guitar work. While touring Europe with Music Maker Blues Review under Dixie Frog and Nueva Onda French labels, she won the Grand Prix du Disque from L’Académie CharlsCros (French Grammy) for Best World Album in 2006 for *Tuscarora Nation Blues*, and a Native American Music Award (NAMMY)

for Best Female Artist for *Follow Your Heart's Desire* in the same year. Pura Fé and Ulali appeared in and consulted for the Rezolution Pictures Documentary *RUMBLE: The Indians That Rocked The World*, which won first place at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Pura Fé commented on her experience with the documentary, "This gave me a chance to reenact a piece of the historical birth of blues music that no one considers or hears about." United States Poet Laureate Joy Harjo once said, "We are systematically being written out of everything." To have a platform to help bring awareness to the mainstream was crucial to Pura Fé and Ulali. Today, Pura Fé lives in Canada and is writing a film for Rezolution Pictures. She is also working with First Nations dance and theater troupes while recording a new album.

SANDEEP DAS

Tabla

A Guggenheim Fellow, Sandeep Das is one of the leading tabla virtuosos in the world today. Since his debut concert at the age of 17 with legendary sitar player Ravi Shankar, Das has built a prolific international reputation spanning over three decades. He has collaborated with top musicians, ensembles, and orchestras from all over the world, and his original compositions have been performed in 50+ countries. Das is the founder of Harmony and Universality through Music (HUM), a nonprofit organization in India that has promoted global understanding through music performance and provided learning opportunities and scholarships for visually impaired children with artistic potential since 2009. His most recent project, Transcending Borders One Note at a Time, launched in 2020 to widespread international acclaim, and seeks to harness the power of music to create positive social change.

SHANE SHANAHAN

Percussion

Percussionist, composer, and arranger Shane Shanahan has combined his studies of drumming traditions from around the world with his background in jazz, rock, and Western art music to create a unique, highly sought after style. He is one of Silkroad's inaugural co-artistic directors, and has performed with Bobby McFerrin, James Taylor, Aretha Franklin, Philip Glass, Alison Krauss, Chaka Khan, and Deep Purple, among others, and has appeared at the White House, playing for President and First Lady Obama. He frequently hosts workshops and clinics at the world's leading universities and museums and collaborates actively with the dance, theater, and yoga communities in the New York area, including several stints on Broadway.

YAZHI GUO

Suona, Chinese Percussion

Co-founder and founding President of the American Academy of World Music, Yazhi Guo is recognized by the industry as one of the best suona performers in the world, and he is committed to integrating Chinese music with world music.

UGA'S VISUAL, LITERARY AND PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVAL

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ARTS



NOVEMBER 2024



UGA
presents.

SILKROAD ENSEMBLE
WITH RHIANNON GIDDENS
American Railroad

SUN, NOV 17, 7:00 pm
Hodgson Concert Hall

PROGRAM

Swannanoa Tunnel/Great Grandpa's Banjo - Traditional, Pura Fé

Far Down Far - Maeve Gilchrist

Swannanoa Tunnel/Steel-Driving Man - Traditional, Arr. Rhiannon Giddens

Pink Butterflies Picking Flowers - Yahzi Guo

Summit - Shane Shanahan

Bani - Balla Koutayé & Mike Block

INTERMISSION

Tamping Song - Haruka Fujii

Rust And Dreams - Layale Chaker

Have You Seen My Man? - Cécile McLorin Salvant

Rela - Sandeep Das

Swannanoa Strings - Traditional, Arr. Silkroad Ensemble

Rainy Day - Rhiannon Giddens, Wu Man

Mahk Jchi - Pura Fé

A Win For You - Michael Abels

PROGRAM NOTES

Swannanoa Tunnel/Great Grandpa's Banjo - Traditional, Pura Fé

Great Grampah's Banjo I named for my Grandmother's grandfather Boyette Lee who played the banjo during slavery. He and his brothers played at every function in the county. Their father was the plantation owner who grew up inheriting his fathers plantation and slaves. One of the slaves he grew up with was Sarah Lee and the love of his life and together they had four sons. The oldest was Boyette Lee who inherited his father's land after slavery was abolished. Boyette married Easter Blackwell who came from the nearby Indian community. She came from generations of women singers. Easter and Boyette had seven daughters who sang. Everybody made music. This song is in memory of them. The words imitate the banjo in this old timey Indian woman's shuffle beat that is danced. I feel my ancestors in my feet and in my heart; they carry me through music.

Far Down Far - Maeve Gilchrist

Francis O'Neill was an Irish-born member of the Chicago police force who rose to superintendent between 1873 and 1905. Chief O'Neill had substantial influence on the evolution of Irish music in the twentieth century due to his collection of Irish folk tunes and songs. Among his many published works is *O'Neill's Music of Ireland*, a collection of more than 1,850 pieces of music. An Irish immigrant living in the U.S. during the peak wave of migration, employed by the relatively new and deeply disorganized concept of a Police Force while also living a life deeply connected to the music of his homeland; his collection of tunes seemed a natural place to find a seed from which this composition grew. I was drawn towards a jig called "The Far Down Farmer."

During my research into the Irish involvement in the building of the American Transcontinental Railroad, I read about the tension that existed on occasion between Catholic and Protestant workers. The Catholic workers, often from a more economically depressed background, were sometimes referred to as "Far Downers." I took this simple two-part jig and deconstructed the vocabulary, using the motifs and intervals as if I were building a train, laying the tracks and allowing the melody to build up momentum and speed as it gets slung between our respective instruments. I hope that this composition pays tribute to the roots of the tune and the back-breaking work of the workers on both sides of the religious and cultural divide while allowing the melody to fly in the hands of women who would likely never have been given a fiddle or a flute, let alone a hammer to build with!

Swannanoa Tunnel/Steel-Driving Man - Traditional, arr. Rhiannon Giddens

"Swannanoa Tunnel" or "O Babe" originated from the black laborers who built the tunnel before crossing over into white culture. The black voices that created the song were soon forgotten, which has happened quite often within the African American experience. "Swannanoa Tunnel" is my tribute to the ghosts of the hard working men who gave their lives, yet whose stories have been forgotten and words claimed not as their own; a reminder of where this music truly comes from.

"Steel Driving Man" is a version of the popular traditional tune "John Henry," the well-known folk hero who beat the steam drill with his hammer, only to die of a burst heart in the end. The version I play is from my mentor Joe Thompson, black traditional fiddler from my part of North Carolina.

Much thanks to the incredible scholarship of Kevin Kehrberg & Jeffrey A. Keith, who painstakingly uncovered this story.

<https://bittersoutherner.com/2020/somebody-died-babe-a-musical-coverup-of-racism-violence-and-greed>

Pink Butterflies Picking Flowers - Yazhi Guo

"Pink Butterflies Picking Flowers" is a traditional piece of Chaozhou folk music from the regions of Guangzhou, Chaozhou, and Shantou in Southern China. It has also gained popularity among Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia. The composition is lively, characterized by a vibrant, playful melody that captures the imagery of a butterfly fluttering among flowers, collecting pollen, and evoking a sense of lighthearted joy.

The Chaozhou people, originating from Fujian and Guangdong, represent a distinct group within China's rich history. They were among the first Chinese immigrants to venture abroad, known for their hard work and resilience—much like bees and butterflies that spread their wings across the globe.

At the heart of the piece is the Suona, a traditional folk instrument from Chaozhou. With its slender body and small horn, the Suona produces a delicate sound, enhanced by a reed crafted from wheat straw.

Tonight's performance of "Pink Butterflies Picking Flowers" holds special significance as we pay tribute to the Chinese laborers who played a vital role in the construction of the American railroads.

Summit - Shane Shanahan

Shanahan's composition originated at a Train Station Trio residency at the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento. It was inspired by the workers who were left out of the famous photo celebrating the driving of the Golden Spike, which completed the Transcontinental Railroad at Promontory Summit, Utah. The western portion of the railroad was built mainly by Chinese immigrants who weathered extremely harsh conditions, accomplishing feats of incredible human strength and persistence. Despite their Herculean efforts, the Chinese were not included in the iconic photo of the railroad's completion, their essential contributions were not acknowledged, they were denied citizenship and, in some cases, were deported back to China.

Summit seeks to highlight this lesser-known chapter of American history while musically navigating the landscapes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, where these workers endured significant sacrifices against the backdrop of the region's remarkable natural beauty.

Bani - Balla Kouyaté & Mike Block

Bani is a traditional piece from Mali with a title that literally means “Refusal.” Referencing the transatlantic slave trade, it’s message revolves around saying “NO!” in order to make the world a better place, and asks both African nations and European nations, as well as their children, to join together in this message of unity.

INTERMISSION

Tamping Song - Haruka Fujii

While doing research for our project American Railroad, I was surprised to discover that after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Japanese immigrants became one of the dominant workforces; by 1906, over 13,000 Japanese immigrants were working for the railroads. Later, under pressure, Japan would stop labor immigration to the United States via the Gentleman’s Agreement of 1908. During this research I also discovered a recording of the “Tamping Song” — a railroad worker’s song released on Columbia Records Japan in 1963. Using an inspirational melody from this song, my work weaves the ambition, dreams, and hopes of the immigrant workers on the front lines of the railroad construction in the US with the sentiment for their homeland.

Rust and Dreams - Layale Chaker

This piece was inspired by my visit last winter to an abandoned train station in Baalbeck, a city in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon. Custom-designed to navigate the steep slopes between Beirut, Damascus and Jerusalem, the railroad linking Lebanon, Palestine and Syria was a world-class engineering feat of the late 19th century. Baalbeck, with its ancient history as a crossroads of civilizations, once represented connection and exchange. The train station, the last stop in Lebanon, was a gateway to the wider world, reflecting the unity of a region that, before colonial rule, was one vast, interconnected land.

This work reflects on that interconnectedness—a region once seamless, now fractured by borders imposed after colonialism, some of which have become impossible to cross. It explores the lost fluidity and exchange between places and peoples, symbolized by the disused railways. Yet beyond mourning the disconnection, it seeks to uncover the enduring desire to reconnect what has been severed—culturally, historically, and physically. The piece meditates on the possibilities of healing these divisions and reimagining a future where shared pathways overcome the boundaries of greed, conquest, and colonial rule.

Have You Seen My Man? - Cécile McLorin Salvant

The sky is clear. A woman sings about her lover. She is intoxicated by the images she paints of him. He is on a train, flying away from her. Still she serenades, with her voice she weaves a tapestry of him, and falls in love with it. She walks along the train tracks, singing of her love. Her ambition is slowly winding like the tracks.

It winds so slowly that she can’t see that it is changing direction. And as it changes direction, she begins to doubt. When she sings, she is not alone. She is joined by the generations of wanderers, who wound and wove their hopes in song. They cannot ride the train, although it was built on their backs. So they walk along the train track with her.

Rela - Sandeep Das

Rela is an homage to the railroad workers of the Indian subcontinent who toiled to develop the country’s massive network of railways in the 19th and 20th century during the British Raj (the era in which India was under British colonial rule). Many parallels can be drawn between the American Transcontinental Railroad and the British development of railroads in India, with both undeniably marked by a complex web of history, modernization, and exploitation in the name of industrial progress.

This piece was inspired by chants attributed to the railroad workers of that era and incorporates a traditional *Tabla rela*, which is a type of improvisatory composition renowned for its high speeds, virtuosity, and cascades of complex notes and rhythms. The Hindi term *rela* comes from the word “rail” or “train,” and it is believed that modern *Tabla relas* were created to mimic the sounds of the first Indian railways.

Rela begins by evoking the sound of railroad crossings through a layer of complex rhythms on metallic instruments such as the triangle, gradually unveiling the sounds of deeper drums as the “train” embarks. Primarily a percussion ensemble piece, it is accompanied by a *nagma* (a looping melody that traditionally accompanies percussion performances in North Indian Classical music) composed in Raga Bhairavi, and features a variety of Indian percussion instruments such as the tabla (a set of two hand drums from North India), *morshung* (a South Indian metal percussion instrument played with the mouth, also called a “jaw harp” or “mouth harp”), and *kanjira* (a small frame drum prevalent in South Indian music) and incorporates instruments like the piano accordion, marimba and Japanese *taiko* drums. The piece concludes with an exciting *tukda* (genre of fixed tabla composition) that dances between multiple instruments in a fiery finale.

Swannanoa Strings - Traditional, Arr. Silkroad Ensemble

Rainy Day - Rhiannon Giddens/Wu Man

This piece was originally brought by our *pipa* player Wu Man. Based on a folk tune popular in Guangdong in southern China, the piece tells a historical story of the Chinese railroad workers, with a slow and soulful melody expressing how the wives and mothers miss their husbands and sons who were building the railroad on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

The Chinese *pipa* originated in Central Asia, and the American banjo came from Africa, both descended from traditional instruments that belong to the plucked strings family. I like the deep powerful sound of the banjo, combined with the



gentle and rich character of the *pipa*. The dialogue between the two instruments brings an artistic charm that is both similar and unique. Of course, the vocal part represents the wife, mother, the storyteller. The magical female voice has always been in my mind when composing, I know that Ms. Rhiannon Giddens's voice will bring strong artistic appeal and imagination to the audience.

English Lyrics:

Rainy day, Rainy day oh
 the rain falls on my side
 without raincoat nor a hat on
 drenched in rain oh
 so pitiful

Chinese Lyrics:

落水天喽 落水天喽
 落水落到
 我身边喽
 湿了衣裳 又无伞喽
 光着头来 真可怜喽

Mahk Jchi - Pura Fé

Mahk Jchi... I wrote for Ulali to sing for Robbie Robertson's Red Road Ensemble album in 1995. The word *Mahk Jchi* means Our Hearts in the Tutelo/Occaneechi/Saponi dialect of eastern NC/VA states. The words translated by Lawrence Dunmore say...

Our Hearts are full, our minds are good, our Ancestors come and give us strength. They say never forget who you are or where you come from.

But this version of *Mahk Jchi* I connect with a song I wrote when I was 16 years old called "Roots". These two songs are similar in melody and fit together. I wrote "Roots" after learning about the devastation that the Uranium strip mining in the Navajo Dene land Four Corners area has done. In these transitional times and great violence on people and earth ... we pray that humanity can sway the authorities that be to move to a better, more sustainable way of life

A Win For You - Michael Abels

To find my way into composing for Silkroad, I began by learning some of the history of the transcontinental railroad. Despite the incredible engineering and nation-building achievement the railroad represented, the suffering and abuse of the laborers is a crucial part of the story. Many other historic events have this kind of dual narrative: inspiration on one hand, exploitation on the other. And yet, the most significant issues facing us today—regional wars, climate change—can only be solved through cooperation, by including everyone in the solution. A resolution that works for the powerful also has to work for those most affected by it.

A Win For You is a study on that idea. It's a song about achievement through cooperation ("A victory for me doesn't come at your cost ... a win for me doesn't mean that you lost") with verses, a bridge and a chorus. In between these sections are instrumental interludes, meditations which also showcase some of the glorious sonorities possible through this wonderful array of Silkroad musicians and cultures.

The piece is hopeful, optimistic, and very rhythmic. The final section is a "game" of rhythmic diminution: With every repeat of the chorus, one eighth note is removed from the time signature, which creates a sense of the music getting faster without actually speeding up. This is meant to evoke the feeling one gets as an epic project nears completion. But also it is a fun challenge for the performers, especially the percussionist.

Scan code to learn more about *American Railroad*





Performing Arts Center
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA