



Friday, November 17, 2023, 8pm  
Zellerbach Hall

## *American Railroad* Silkroad Ensemble with Rhiannon Giddens

### FEATURING ARTISTS

Rhiannon Giddens, *banjo, voice*

Shawn Conley, *bass*

Pura Fé Crescioni, *lap-steel guitar, voice*

Haruka Fujii, *percussion*

Sandeep Das, *tabla*

Karen Ouzounian, *cello*

Mazz Swift, *violin, voice*

Niwel Tsumbu, *guitar*

Francesco Turrisi, *frame drums, accordion*

Kaoru Watanabe, *Japanese flutes and percussion*

Michi Wiancko, *violin*

Wu Man, *pipa*

Yazhi Guo, *suona, Chinese percussion*

*This program will be performed with one intermission.*

*This performance is made possible, in part, by S. Shariq Yosufzai and Brian James  
and by the National Endowment for the Arts.*

*Silkroad has created a dedicated website for American Railroad. For more information  
on the program and artists, please visit [silkroad.org/american-railroad](http://silkroad.org/american-railroad) or scan this QR code  
using your smartphone's camera (please darken your screen during performance):*



As a social-impact organization and home to a Grammy Award-winning musical ensemble, Silkroad works to inspire innovative collaborations that add more equity and justice into the world through the power of the arts. Today, under the leadership of Artistic Director Rhiannon Giddens, Silkroad reaches new heights through a commitment to new music, a re-sparked mission towards cultural collaboration, and a reinigorated focus on high-quality arts education that both reflects its mission and the times in which we live.



Ebrey Flintz

Rhiannon Giddens

Silkroad's newest initiative, *American Railroad*, illuminates the impact of African American, Chinese, Irish, and other immigrant communities on the creation of the US Transcontinental Railroad and connecting railways in North America, and the impact of those railways upon communities displaced by them, including indigenous ones. Exploring the dissemination of cultures across the United States, the railroad was to North America what the Silk Road was to Asia, Africa, and Europe.

After the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, a trip from coast to coast that used to take months was shortened to just under a week, allowing for the transport of goods and ideas across the continent in ways previously inconceivable. Profit-seeking corporations and the American government financed it, but the people who actually built the railroad and who were most affected by it are the focus of this program—Indigenous and African Americans as well Irish, Chinese, Japanese, and other immigrant laborers whose contributions have been largely erased from history. Silkroad's *American Railroad* seeks to right these past wrongs by highlighting untold stories and amplifying unheard voices from these communities, painting a more accurate picture of the global diasporic origin of the American Empire.

Led by artistic director Rhiannon Giddens, each stop on the *American Railroad* tour will contextualize—or rather re-contextualize—the railroad through music. Chinese traditional musics on the *suona* and *pipa* are contrasted with the fiddle and banjo of Black musical traditions, or their Indigenous and Celtic counterparts. These cultural intersections reveal a thread of commonality despite their varied origins, and remind us of the intricate richness of the American story.

The program includes three new commissions by Cécile McLorin Salvant, Suzanne Kite, and Silkroad artist Wu Man, as well as re-envisioned arrangements by Rhiannon Giddens and fellow Silkroad artists Haruka Fujii, Mazz Swift, and Maeve Gilchrist.

Giddens' new arrangement, broken into vignettes interspersed throughout the program, is inspired by "Swannanoa Tunnel," a work song from the African Americans forced to labor on the railroad in Giddens' home state of North Carolina—a tune that has long been associated with bluegrass and folk artists, its origins forgotten. Grammy

Award-winning vocalist and composer Cécile McLorin Salvant's work is inspired by stories shared with and collected by Silkroad artists. And Oglala Lakota artist, composer, and academic Suzanne Kite has created a graphic score using the Lakota written language based on dreams from members of the Silkroad Ensemble.

Silkroad artists Haruka Fujii and Maeve Gilchrist provide their own recontextualizations of railroad songs from immigrant communities. Fujii's "Tamping Song" celebrates the Japanese immigrant contribution to the railroad, particularly after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, while Gilchrist's "Far Down Far" shines light on the tensions between Catholic and Protestant communities within Irish railroad workers. Both pieces were originally created for Silkroad's recent *Uplifted Voices*—another program intended to germinate ideas for *American Railroad*—but have been re-orchestrated for this larger tour.

#### ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Yo-Yo Ma conceived Silkroad in 1998, recognizing the historical Silk Road as a model for radical cultural collaboration—for the exchange of ideas, tradition, and innovation across borders. In an innovative experiment, he brought together musicians from the lands of the Silk Road to co-create a musical language founded on difference, thus creating the foundation of Silkroad: both a touring ensemble comprised of world-class musicians from all over the globe and a social-impact organization working to make a positive impact across borders through the arts. Today, under the leadership of Artistic Director Rhiannon Giddens, Silkroad leads social impact initiatives and educational programming alongside the creation of new music by the Grammy Award-winning Silkroad Ensemble. For more information, please visit [Silkroad.org](http://Silkroad.org).

**Rhiannon Giddens** has made a singular and iconic career out of stretching her brand of

## The Crowden School

Inspiring whole-child education for grades 3–8, rooted in the collaborative art of chamber music



[crowdenschool.org](http://crowdenschool.org)

folk music, with its miles-deep historical roots and contemporary sensibilities, into just about every field imaginable. A two-time Grammy Award-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 up people 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 Giddens 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."

Giddens' third solo studio album, *You're The One*, was released by Nonesuch Records on August 18.