



BILLING

Phoenix Rising: Silkroad Ensemble with Rhiannon Giddens

FEATURING SILKROAD ARTISTS

[Jeffery Beecher, Bass](#)
[Sandeep Das, Tabla](#)
[Haruka Fujii, Percussion](#)
[Rhiannon Giddens, Banjo, Voice](#)
[Maeve Gilchrist, Celtic Harp](#)
[Mario Gotoh, Viola](#)
[Joseph Gramley, Percussion](#)
[Wu Man, Pipa](#)
[Karen Ouzounian, Cello](#)
[Mazz Swift, Violin, Voice](#)
[Francesco Turrisi, Accordion, Frame Drums](#)
[Kojiro Umezaki, Shakuhachi](#)
[Kaoru Watanabe, Japanese Flute, Percussion](#)
[Reylon Yount, Yangqin](#)

CREW

Noelle Panepento, Producer & Tour Manager
Ashley Martin, Asst. Producer & Stage Manager
Francesca Cecala, Front of House Engineer
Justin Tamplin, Monitor Engineer
Nick Houfek, Lighting Designer
Aneesh Kumar, Production Assistant
Alysha Addetia, Merch & Artist Assistant

NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, RHIANNON GIDDENS

From its ancient Greek origins to its indigenous roots in America, the phoenix is a global symbol for rebirth and renewal. Known for its fiery purple, orange, and gold feathers and crimson red breast, this mythical bird perishes in flames after setting itself on fire and then rises from the ashes after being born anew. We, as Silkroad, have been undergoing a transformation in our own right that will propel us to new heights of leveraging our music to create a more hopeful and inclusive world.

As we prepare to emerge from multiple pandemics that have caused devastating loss, we vision a peaceful and just future while still honoring the central tenets of our past; we offer to you *Phoenix Rising*: a collective grieving song and clarion call, uniting audiences through varied cultural experiences and challenging each of us to reflect on, celebrate, and activate our unique talents to effect change.

This is the first of many new and exciting projects from Silkroad, and I cannot wait to share it with you. Together we rise and fall, speaking our truths, honoring our forgotten histories, and

looking to our collective future as we investigate this new chapter and uncover the world within American music.

—Rhiannon Giddens

ABOUT RHIANNON GIDDENS

Grammy Award-winning musician and vocalist Rhiannon Giddens has pursued a lifelong quest to shine light on under-recognized voices, genres, and musical traditions. A MacArthur “Genius Grant” recipient, Giddens co-founded the Grammy Award-winning Carolina Chocolate Drops, and she has been nominated for six additional Grammys for her work as a soloist and collaborator. As a performer, composer, and cross-cultural connector, she has helped to change the understanding of both American and world music. Giddens has performed with the Silkroad Ensemble numerous times, but her appearances with them this season will be her first since succeeding Yo-Yo Ma as Artistic Director. Along with Silkroad’s artists, Giddens has shaped a program that will serve to connect the ever-evolving organization and its Ensemble.

ABOUT SILKROAD

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 in 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. You are invited to get involved and join us in our work to transcend cultural division by using music and the arts to build a more equitable, hopeful, and just world. For more information, [please visit Silkroad.org](http://Silkroad.org).

PROGRAM NOTES

Phoenix Rising: Silkroad Ensemble with Rhiannon Giddens

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

As a social-impact organization and home to a Grammy Award-winning musical ensemble, Silkroad works to inspire collaboration in innovative ways 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 reinvigorated focus to high-quality arts education that both reflects its mission and the times in which we live.

Phoenix Rising takes a cross-section of Silkroad’s award-winning compositions and arrangements and re-imagines them for today. Keeping an eye on the past, Silkroad and Giddens have also collaborated on new works that coalesce her unique worldview with the Ensemble’s collective experience during the pandemic. As such, *Phoenix Rising* will unveil three major new commissions by an amazing amalgamation of Silkroad artists: Sandeep Das,

Maeve Gilchrist, and Kaoru Watanabe. The program will also include new arrangements by Rhiannon Giddens, Colin Jacobsen, Edward Pérez, and Mazz Swift.

Changes to the program will be announced from the stage.

The Call — Maeve Gilchrist*

They say, "look back from the last of the land to the last of sky and sea and know, This is all there is of it

This is all we have in hand."

(From 'Ocean', by David Harsent)

A lone voice, a harp and the guttural sounds of Oceanic rumblings. In this new piece for Kamancheh, voices, Celtic harp, Taiko drums, strings and soprano saxophone; a simple melody is echoed back in different tongues as a wash of texture and sounds reflect the transience of water, erosion and ever-moving life. Drawing on melodic material from the North of Scotland and inspired, in part, by the monophonic singing textures of the Gaelic Free Kirk on the Outer Hebrides; this new commission is a peaceful 'call to arms' as we gather our global family, our respective musical languages and come together to create beauty and change.

— Maeve Gilchrist

O, Death — Traditional, arr. by Rhiannon Giddens**

During the last year, I've found myself drawn to old folk music from around my parts (North Carolina and the American South) to help me deal with some of the massiveness of this last year. This song is a well-known traditional piece sung that came to popular notice when it was sung by Ralph Stanley in the wildly popular film O Brother, Where Art Thou? But this version from noted folklorist Bessie Jones is where I found inspiration - her approach is rooted in African American traditions and really spoke to me. I recorded "O Death" on my newest album, They're Calling Me Home, with Francesco Turrisi on frame drum. These traditional songs have a way of getting to the bones of humanity, showing the stark contrast of life and death, and I thought it might do the same in a new setting with Silkroad.

— Rhiannon Giddens

Ascending Bird — Traditional, arr. by Colin Jacobsen and Siamak Aghaei**

In the summer of 2004, I had the opportunity to visit Iran, the home of Siamak Aghaei and Kayhan Kalhor, musicians and friends whom I met through the Silkroad Ensemble. The visit, made alongside my friend and colleague Nicholas Cords, was a cultural exchange made possible by Silkroad and would prove to be a life-changing experience. Besides learning more about traditional Persian architecture, calligraphy, arts and crafts, and their close link to Persian music, we spent many hours in the homes of both Kayhan and Siamak listening to them play and talk about the philosophy behind their music. Siamak is a bit of a modern-day Bartók in that he has traveled around Iran making field

recordings of folk musicians from the many and varied traditions represented by the different regions of Iran. He dusted off one such recording and the sound that emerged from the speakers gave us a form of vertigo. Our ears were held to attention by the sound of an incredibly potent and piercing instrument, which Siamak told us was made out of the fused bones of a bird and measured little more than two inches in length. The music also encoded a popular mythical story of a bird attempting to fly to the sun. Failing on the first two attempts, on the third try the bird loses its physical body in the radiant embrace of the sun, a metaphor for spiritual transcendence. What emerged from this experience was “Ascending Bird” — comprised of Siamak's reinterpretation of the traditional tune to which I added further textural layers and combined with an original coda.

— Colin Jacobsen

Sacred Cloud Music — Zhao Jiping

Goin' Home (from the Grammy Award-winning album, *Sing Me Home*) — Antonin Dvořák, arr. by Rhiannon Giddens and Mazz Swift**

Ho-oh — Kaoru Watanabe*

Ho-Oh is the Japanese name of a mythological bird whose origins in China date back to 3000 BC. Ho-Oh has often been translated as simply Phoenix, although it is a different creature than that of Greek mythology. The Ho-Oh is often described as a combination of different birds and animals, i.e., the head of a golden pheasant, the long legs of a crane, and the luxurious tail of a peacock with a tortoise's shell on its back.

The presence of the Ho-Oh is ubiquitous in Japan, adorning the roofs of Shinto shrines, on Buddhist temples, on paper money, in fine art, and in pop culture. The Ho-Oh is present in Gagaku, the Japanese court music that was initially imported from China and Korea in the 8th century, and one of the primary influences for this composition: The Ho-Oh is painted on the ornate giant dadaiko drum and is said to be represented in the shape of the wind instrument known as the sho, with its multiple reeds arrayed like unfurling wings.

Japan, at the eastern end of the silk road, is in a sense a repository of the music that started in Africa and traveled across the Middle East and Asia. However, Japan, being an archipelago and for other political reasons, spent many long periods being cut off from the rest of the world, allowing music and instruments to grow and develop in unique ways. One of the ideas behind this piece is to reunite Gagaku with its distant relatives and see what emerges.

What I envision for this composition is the musicians of the ensemble, representing musical styles from across the globe, study the phrasing, nuances, and rhythms that give Gagaku its sense of ethereal and elegant timelessness and then try to apply them to their instruments and musical styles to unearth connections and throughlines and create new vocabularies that could bridge cultures.

Like the ancient bird of mythology, the strength and beauty of the piece come from the seemingly disparate parts coming together in a hybrid new form. The hope for the composition is to be, like the Ho-Oh, a harbinger of an era of peace, prosperity and equality.

— Kaoru Watanabe

Ekla Cholo Re — Sandeep Das, Lyrics by Rabindranath Tagore***

This past year, India suffered losses on a massive scale never seen before. Within a few weeks, I and many people I know were suddenly reeling from the unexpected losses of family, friends, loved ones, mentors, and some of our country's most treasured musicians and artists. When I was asked to create a piece for Phoenix Rising, my mind immediately went to Rabindranath Tagore's iconic song, "Ekla Cholo Re." The refrain states, "If no one heeds your call, then walk alone." Tagore, one of India's most celebrated poets, was the first person of color and the first non-European to win a Nobel Prize for literature, writing thousands of songs that have stayed relevant beyond the half century since his passing. Music, I believe, is an instrument of healing — a means to create awareness, a conversation unbounded by language, and a spark that can lead to change on a global level. As "Ekla Cholo Re" rang through the Independence movement of India, I believe its words still ring true and are inspirational in our current times.

— Sandeep Das

St. James Infirmary Blues — Traditional; arr. Michael Ward-Bergeman

New Ritual — Traditional, arranged by member of Silkroad**

Prominently featuring a traditional matsuri (festival) rhythm from the town of Kamitsuki on Miyake Island, this piece features improvisations by the percussionists in the Silkroad Ensemble along with pipa and shakuhachi. Festivals in Japan, as in most parts of the world, are both sacred and secular celebrations of community, of heritage, and of planting and harvest seasons. This piece captures the spirit of the matsuri through joyful individual expression and communal effort.

Cut the Rug: IV. Wake the Dead — David Bruce, arr. by Edward Pérez**

When composer David Bruce developed Cut the Rug for the Ensemble in 2012, he was inspired not only by the concept of the historical Silk Road but also by filmmaker Tony Gatlif's documentary Latcho Drom, which explores the broad, multicultural embrace of Roma music. "The idea of all these diverse but equally vibrant musics being part of one large family has always appealed to me," David says, "as has the ease and naturalness with which new styles have been integrated into a developing musical language as the Roma have moved from one area to another. In my piece I think there is a similarly wide spread of cultural influences, which I hope to integrate to create something new — there

are a few drops of Kyrgyzstan; definite hints of Turkey; a pinch of flamenco; perhaps even a dash of American Cajun music; and many influences besides.”

The title is a play on the rugs the Central Asian region so famously produces, but it also teases the Jazz Age lingo “cut the rug” — the deft skill of a dancer who can wow a crowd.

Encore

**World Premiere, Commissioned by Silkroad for Phoenix Rising*

***New Arrangement, Commissioned by Silkroad for Phoenix Rising*

****Commissioned by Silkroad for Phoenix Rising*

RUNTIME

75 minutes, no intermission

Special Thanks

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