



SILKROAD

Silkroad's Origin

In a world marked by division and conflict, can music make a difference? Silkroad was conceived in 1998 by cellist Yo-Yo Ma as a reminder that even as rapid globalization resulted in division, it brought extraordinary possibilities for working together. Seeking to understand this dynamic, he recognized the historical Silk Road as a model for cultural collaboration – for the exchange of ideas, tradition, and innovation across borders. In a groundbreaking experiment, he brought together musicians from the lands of the Silk Road to co-create a new artistic idiom: a musical language founded in difference, a metaphor for the benefits of a more connected world.

And thus Silkroad was born, as both a touring ensemble 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 creates music that engages difference, sparking radical cultural collaboration and passion-driven learning for a more hopeful and inclusive world.

Global Musician Workshop (GMW)

Silkroad's GMW is a musician training program modeled after the genesis of the Silkroad Ensemble, through which musicians from all over the world come together to create incredible new music. Taking place in both Boston, MA and Hangzhou, China, GMW highlights the diverse contributions and talents of global musicians, showcasing styles of music that represent a wide range of backgrounds and traditions.

From the creation of vibrant arrangements on-stage that blend music from India, Mali, the United States, China, Lebanon, and more, to workshops, elective classes, and rehearsals, GMW participants learn from one another and build foundational skills to share culturally-minded music.

The Impact of GMW

While the impact of GMW reaches so many communities around the world, you can learn how the program has provided a lifeline for the preservation and enjoyment of Afghan music, outlawed by the Taliban since 2021, through a Boston Globe article ([here](#)) on Huma Rahimi, a trailblazing sitar player and singer hailing from Kabul, as well as a feature in Rolling Stone ([here](#)) on Qudrat Wasefi, a trumpeter, prior Silkroad Intern, and GMW participant.

What's Next for GMW?

Silkroad is continually seeking new ways to grow the impact and reach of GMW around the world. In 2024, Silkroad established the first sister GMW program in Hangzhou, China to reach expanded participants from different parts of the world alongside new artistic partners.

In addition, Silkroad is currently working towards developing training programs in South America, Africa, and Europe, as well as envisioning program models for youth ages 14-18.

Reflections from Ran Wang, 2025 GMW Participant Performing on the Guzheng

“ For me, GMW was an act of courage. Coming from a conservatory background in China, where training was more traditional and academic, I had to teach myself to step beyond those boundaries. I also worried about language being a barrier — whether I could really communicate my ideas. But I discovered quickly that everyone was welcoming and supportive. The experience gave me confidence to collaborate across languages and styles. Professionally, I was deeply inspired by how openly participants shared their work, sought gigs, and initiated collaborations. I learned so much about how to arrange and balance many instruments in an ensemble, how to improvise in a large group, and how to communicate while preserving my own instrument’s voice. Even in areas like rhythm training, ear training, and score reading, I gained insights that broaden my perspective and help me approach new instruments with greater confidence.



What makes GMW truly unique is its extraordinary community. Nowhere else have I encountered such a diverse gathering of professional musicians, each bringing instruments and traditions that are rarely seen outside their regions. The program has a remarkable convening power — bringing together outstanding artists who are not only highly skilled, but also genuinely open and generous. The faculty were equally inspiring, with deep knowledge of world instruments and the ability to guide and coordinate across traditions. Of course, not every collaboration feels effortless, but the willingness to learn from one another creates invaluable growth. The scale, spirit, and sincerity of GMW make it unlike any residency or workshop I have experienced. ”

Reflections from Claudia Garcia, 2025 GMW Participant Performing on the Electric Bass



“ I grew up reading music, and I wanted to be the kind of musician who feels music differently. I felt like if I played with music and the stand fell, or the wind took my music away, I would be paralyzed and not know what to do. I wanted to pursue opportunities to feel free making this thing that I love, and GMW was on my list. I even had a vision board with Silkroad. When I got accepted, I cried of happiness. I couldn’t believe it, that this was going to happen to me, that this was going to be part of my life experience as a musician. I went last year. I felt so connected to a very honest way of making music. That’s what I love about it.

You learn from music that’s not traditional. You learn from people, experiences, and it’s amazing. Seeing someone who is so great as a musician, but also so great as a person — you can exchange with this person — visions of life, visions of how you see music. I felt that I wasn’t alone. We are all going through the same path, even though we come from different paths.

Life becomes overwhelming so many times. I love music and I love making music, but sometimes you cannot make a living out of it. I started when I was 18 years old, so there was a bit of a disadvantage. I was stepping away from music slowly and it was going to the back of my life. GMW was an opportunity to find purpose in why I love doing this. It was very meaningful because I felt validated, hearing from others: ‘we want your vision of music and we want you to be a part of this.’ It made me reconnect with music.

Before, I had this identity crisis calling myself a musician, because I didn’t do it full time. But at GMW, I feel like a musician. I feel like I’m an artist, and that feels so good for my soul. ”