

The Soraya Welcomes Silkroad Ensemble with Rhiannon Giddens in LA premiere of the “American Railroad” Project

Sun, Nov 12 at 7pm; Tickets start at \$42 and are available at [TheSoraya.org](https://www.thesoraya.org).

The Soraya’s Nov. 12 concert precedes a FREE community event [at LA’s Union Station](#) featuring stories and songs from Rhiannon Giddens, members of the Silkroad Ensemble, and LA author Lisa See on Monday, Nov. 13 at 6 p.m. [Click here to register](#).

(Los Angeles, CA) Nov 6, 2023— GRAMMY Award-winning **Silkroad Ensemble** brings its multi-year project, ***American Railroad***, to The Soraya on Sun, Nov 12 at 7pm followed by a 6pm free community event on Mon, Nov 13 at LA’s historic Union Station. Conceived by Silkroad’s artistic director, **Rhiannon Giddens**, ***American Railroad*** illuminates the creation of the transcontinental railroad, one of the greatest feats of technology in the 19th century, and equally a complicated chapter in American history for those who labored to build it, including the Chinese, Irish, and Japanese immigrants, as well as the African American and Indigenous people.

“The *American Railroad* project has been years in the making, and the program we've created for our first tour is only the beginning. In it, we shed light on those who have been erased or overlooked throughout American history and merge with it Silkroad's unique ability to amplify voices from a multitude of backgrounds and cultures. The result is a tapestry of stories, traditions, and music that have shaped our multifaceted cultural identity, and that must be heard and recognized. I hope audiences across California will leave these performances with a clearer sense of where we come from, how we got here, what it cost us—and that we collectively reflect on where we're headed,” said Giddens.

On **Mon, Nov 13 at 6pm, Silkroad will present *Railroad Roots: Stories and Songs from Rhiannon Giddens, Lisa See, and Members of the Silkroad Ensemble*, a free community event at Los Angeles Union Station**. The evening includes musical performances by Silkroad Artistic Director Rhiannon Giddens, Silkroad artists Wu Man and Haruka Fujii, and guest artist Pura Fé, as well as a discussion about the railroad, the communities who built it, and the people who were displaced and most affected by it.

Joining Silkroad for the conversational portion of the event is bestselling author Lisa See, whose great-great-grandfather worked on the Railroad in the mid-1800s, as described in See's memoir *On Gold Mountain*. See grew up in and currently lives in Los Angeles; her great-grandfather, Fong See, overcame obstacles at every step to become the godfather of the city's Chinatown neighborhood and the patriarch of a sprawling family. Her books have been celebrated for their authentic, deeply researched, lyrical stories about Chinese characters and cultures.

The Nov. 13 event is presented in partnership with Metro Art Los Angeles, the Pacific Council on International Policy, and the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya). [Click here to register.](#)

About *American Railroad*

Beginning in November 2023, Grammy Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning Giddens and the Grammy Award-winning Silkroad Ensemble will embark on a multi-city U.S. tour, with performances and corresponding educational activities focused in areas with notable railroad-related cultural history. The tour program includes three new commissions by Cécile McLorin Salvant, Suzanne Kite, and Silkroad artist Wu Man, as well as re-envisioned arrangements by Giddens and fellow Silkroad artists Haruka Fujii, Maeve Gilchrist, and Mazz Swift.

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 built it 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.

The project—three years in the making—represents Giddens's vision for Silkroad, having first raised the idea early in her tenure as Artistic Director. In addition to the upcoming tour, *American Railroad* will include multidisciplinary components ranging from site-specific visual installations to an album, a documentary series, and curricular materials for use by educators and the public.

Though the first tour officially launches this fall, preparation began much earlier through artist retreats and site visits across the nation—to Standing Rock (ND), New York City, and San Francisco (CA)—where artists engaged in historical and cultural research, which informs the overall storytelling and the commissions specifically. The process also included a series of retreats and open workshops, titled *Train Station Trios*, held in Sacramento (CA), New York City, and Springdale (AR). These culminated in informal, hourlong performances comprising trios of Silkroad musicians and local scholars and featuring new music inspired by the railroad's impact on that particular area. The *Train Station Trios* series will continue in 2024 and beyond.

2023 *American Railroad* artists:

Rhiannon Giddens, banjo/vocals

Mazz Swift, violin/vocals
Wu Man, pipa
Sandeep Das, tabla
Haruka Fujii, percussion
Shawn Conley, bass
Karen Ouzounian, cello/vocals
Kaoru Watanabe, Japanese flutes/percussion
Michi Wiancko, violin
Francesco Turrisi*, frame drums/accordion
Niwel Tsumbu*, guitar
Pura Fé Crescioni*, lap-steel guitar/vocals
Yazhi Guo*, suona
*Guest artist
Projections by Camilla Tassi

About Silkroad Ensemble

Yo-Yo Ma conceived Silkroad in 1998, recognizing 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 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 Boston-based non-profit organization working to make a positive impact across borders through the arts.

Today, under the leadership of Artistic Director Rhiannon Giddens and Executive Director Ben Hartley, Silkroad leads social impact initiatives and educational programming alongside the creation of new music by the Grammy Award-winning Silkroad Ensemble. To learn more, please visit silkroad.org and @silkroadproject on social media.

About Rhiannon Giddens

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-winner, MacArthur “Genius” grant recipient, singer and instrumentalist, 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 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.”

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

About Lisa See

Lisa See is an accomplished American writer and novelist, renowned for her profound literary contributions, which include the celebrated book 'On Gold Mountain: The One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of My Chinese American Family' and a series of bestselling novels such as 'The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane,' 'The Island of Sea Women,' and 'Lady Tan's Circle of Women.' Her paternal great-grandfather, Fong See, was of Chinese descent, influencing both her life and her literary work, which has often revolved around the rich tapestry of Chinese American history. Lisa's debut work, 'On Gold Mountain,' was a national bestseller and a New York Times Notable Book, chronicling her great-grandfather's remarkable journey from overcoming adversity to becoming the 100-year-old patriarch of Los Angeles's Chinatown. With her deep connection to Chinese heritage and contributions to cultural events emphasizing the importance of Los Angeles and Chinatown, Lisa See is an exceptional author with a unique perspective on American history and cultural diversity. You can learn more about her at lisasee.com.

American Railroad Acknowledgements & Funding Credits

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Special thanks to the many communities across America whose culture bearers have worked with the artists of Silkroad to relay history and share stories and artistry integral to the creation of the music for the *American Railroad* tour and the overall initiative.

For tickets and interview requests, please contact:

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- **ACCESS YOUR PRESS KIT HERE.**

For questions or ticket information, visit www.TheSoraya.org or call the Ticket Office at (818) 677-3000. Office hours are 11a-4p, Tuesday through Saturday.

About the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)

The Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for The Performing Arts (The Soraya) is an award-winning, state-of-the-art 1,700-seat theatre designed and built by HGA Architects and Engineers and opened in January 2011 as the Valley Performing Arts Center (VPAC). Through a transformative gift by Younes and Soraya Nazarian the venue was renamed as The Soraya in 2017. Vibrant programming has served to establish The Soraya as the intellectual and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and its 1.8 million residents, and as one of the top arts and culture venues in Southern California. Since its inaugural season, The Soraya has presented over 500 artists and companies across the genres of music, dance, theater and film and is a highly in demand location for filming and rental events.

The Soraya's 2023/2024 Season boldly advances the expansive sound of orchestras both traditional and contemporary; the freestyle vibe of jazz; an array of dance luminaries, and a cultural bounty drawn from the musical well of global voices. The Soraya continues its vigorous commitment to innovating, excelling,

and amplifying access by offering a wide variety of performances that reflect Los Angeles' many distinctive communities and featuring new and original work and artists from the local region as well as nationally and around the world.

Located on the vibrant campus of California State University Northridge (CSUN), The Soraya and the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication share an integral link that enhances student access and opportunities in the arts and performing arts. A \$5 million contribution from record producer and former California Lieutenant Governor Mike Curb was pivotal in ensuring the completion and opening of The Soraya in 2011. For his founding support and in acknowledgment of the integral relationship between the Mike Curb College and The Soraya, Mike Curb is recognized as one of The Soraya's Cornerstone Benefactors. This partnership fosters academic and artistic excellence, elevating the talents and the future growth of CSUN's students through master classes, student tickets, concerts of student ensembles, and students appearing alongside renowned artists such as Wynton Marsalis, Aida Cuevas, and Martha Graham Dance Company.

What: *American Railroad Silkroad Ensemble with Rhiannon Giddens.*
When: **Sun, Nov 12 at 7pm**
Where: Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)
18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330
Tickets: Tickets start at \$42
Website: www.thesoraya.org
Phone: 818-677-3000

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