

Classical Music Legend Claims Contemporary Music Prize

Yo-Yo Ma awarded \$100,000 Vilcek Prize for career achievements

*Songwriter James “JHart” Abrahart, hip-hop artist Blitz the
Ambassador, and pianist Tigran win \$35,000
Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise*

New York, NY - February 5, 2013 - The Vilcek Foundation is pleased to announce Yo-Yo Ma as the winner of the 2013 Vilcek Prize for Contemporary Music. While Mr. Ma is widely acknowledged as a master cellist in the field of classical music, the Vilcek Prize is the first to recognize and honor his contributions to contemporary music.

The annual Vilcek Prize in the Arts, which comes with a \$100,000 cash award, recognizes immigrants who have made significant contributions to the American arts. Mr. Ma, born in France to Chinese parents, was selected for his superb artistry; his daring versatility that spans genres as diverse as tango, bluegrass, and the folk music of China, Japan, and Central Asia; and his leadership in expanding musical knowledge across cultures.

“Yo-Yo Ma’s faith in the connection between the arts and enlightened citizenship echoes that of the Vilcek Foundation. We are delighted to bestow the prize to someone who understands how art brings people together, no matter where in the world they are from,” said Marica Vilcek, Vice President of the Foundation. “In addition to his outstanding body of recordings, his creation of the Silk Road Project has brought forth work that is innovative, interdisciplinary, and multicultural.”

Mr. Ma began to study the cello at age four and established himself first in the world of classical music. His wide-ranging interests have led him to explore a variety of other musical forms. Among his most well known contemporary recordings are *Appalachia Waltz*, *Hush* (with Bobby McFerrin), *Obrigado Brazil*, and *Songs of Joy and Peace*. Mr. Ma is the founder of the Silk Road Project, a nonprofit organization that promotes innovation and learning through the arts and fosters collaborations between musicians and composers from different cultures. He has received numerous honors, including more than 15 GRAMMY Awards, the Avery Fisher Prize, the National Medal of the Arts, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Polar Music Prize, and the Kennedy Center Honor. Mr. Ma serves as a UN Messenger of Peace and is a member of President Obama’s Committee on the Arts & the Humanities.

The Vilcek Foundation is also announcing the winners of the three Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Contemporary Music, each receiving a \$35,000 cash award. These prizes recognize a younger generation of foreign-born artists at earlier stages of their careers; this year, the prizes were awarded to music professionals, aged 30 or under. They are:

James Abrahart - More commonly known as JHart, James Abrahart is one of the songwriters behind pop, hip-hop, and R&B superstars such as Justin Bieber, Jason Derulo, David Guetta, Flo Rida, and Trey Songz. Since being signed by Universal Music in 2010, the 24 year-old British-born songwriter has been busy: last May, JHart co-wrote “Take You,” a song for Justin Bieber’s album

“Believe,” which has since gone platinum. That same month, Jason Derulo performed “Undeclared,” a song he co-wrote with JHart, on the finale of American Idol, which reached an audience of 22 million viewers. Not content to remain behind the scenes though, JHart also wrote and featured on “Surrender,” a single for legendary DJ Paul Oakenfold, which reached #3 on the Billboard Dance charts.

Samuel Bazawule - Originally from Ghana, Bazawule is more than just a musician: He is a cultural emissary, as his stage name, Blitz the Ambassador, indicates. Blitz infuses an African sensibility into his music as an MC, producer, and composer. He is backed by a horn section, the Embassy Ensemble, and raps fluently in English and Twi, a dialect of Ghana. The 30 year-old has released two albums and one live EP, the most recent being the well-reviewed *Native Sun*. He has collaborated with a wide range of artists, such as Les Nubians, Chuck D, Shad, and Corneille. Blitz wrote and co-directed a short film as an accompaniment to his *Native Sun* album, of the same name, which was a selection of the Brooklyn ActNow Film Festival.

Tigran - The Armenian-born pianist, vocalist, and composer Tigran draws upon a wide range of influences for his music. Although trained as a classical and jazz musician, he is just as inspired by Armenian folk music, Indian classical music, beatboxing, funk, poetry, and more. Despite being only 25 years old, Tigran has cultivated an international presence, having won first place at the Thelonious Monk Jazz Piano Competition, and second place at the Martial Solal International Jazz Competition, in 2006, and a French Grammy Award in 2011, among other honors. He has recorded five albums; his most widely known album, *A Fable*, was released in 2011, and is a solo collection of rhythmic and harmonic experimentation that is an original blend of Armenian folk music and jazz traditions.

The recipients were selected by independent juries composed of leading experts in the music profession, representing institutions such as Universal Music, NYU Clive Davis School of Recorded Music, *XXL Magazine*, and The ARChive of Contemporary Music.

The prizes will be presented at an awards ceremony at the Mandarin Oriental in New York City in April 2013. Bob Santelli, executive director of The GRAMMY Museum, will present the music prizes. In addition to prizes in the arts, the Vilcek Foundation also awards prizes in the field of biomedical science. For more information on the Vilcek Prizes, please visit www.vilcek.org.

THE VILCEK FOUNDATION

The Vilcek Foundation is dedicated to raising awareness of immigrant contributions to the American arts and sciences.

For questions regarding the Vilcek Foundation and Vilcek Prizes in Biomedical Science, contact Joyce Li at (212) 472-2500 or at joyce@vilcek.org.

For questions regarding the winners of the Vilcek Prizes in Contemporary Music, contact Jenny Lerner at (212) 486-7229 or at lernernyc@aol.com.