

THE MUSIC OF STRANGERS:

YO-YO MA AND THE SILK ROAD ENSEMBLE

GRADES 5-12
CLASSROOM GUIDE

USING
THIS GUIDE ▶

ABOUT
THE FILM ▶

DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS & ▶
POST-VIEWING
ACTIVITIES

MEDIA LITERACY
RESOURCES ▶

SUPPLEMENTAL
RESOURCES ▶

ARTICLES AND
REVIEWS ▶

TEACHING THE FILM:

The Music of Strangers is an uplifting documentary about a group of world-class musicians who come together to explore the meaning of culture and the potential of the arts to promote peace and understanding. A class screening of the film may complement an Arts, Music, or Social Studies curriculum, and will encourage students to consider the rewards and challenges of crossing cultural boundaries. Taught in conjunction with this guide, the film will challenge students to think critically about global conflict, creativity, and the role of culture in shaping a meaningful life. Discussion questions and supplemental materials facilitate further research into related topics such as the career path of a musician, the meaning of the arts and international politics in the 21st century.

All SFFS Youth Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFS Youth Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

Guide created by Lizzy Brooks.
Please direct all comments and queries to Keith Zwölfer, Youth Education Manager:

San Francisco Film Society Youth Education
39 Mesa Street, Suite 110 · The Presidio San Francisco, CA 94129-1025
kzwolfer@sffs.org
415.561.5040

SAN FRANCISCO
FILM SOCIETY



USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of **The Music of Strangers**.

Support materials are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

ABOUT THE FILM

An infectious street concert opens this buoyant musical journey, the story of renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma and his Silk Road Ensemble, a collective of the world's greatest musicians. Initially drawn from the Central Asian "Silk Road" countries and regions of China, India, Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, the composition of the group eventually broadened to include talents from all over the globe. As Oscar®-winning filmmaker Morgan Neville (*Twenty Feet from Stardom*, SFIFF 2013; *Best of Enemies*, SFIFF 2015) frames it, the Silk Road Ensemble arose out of Yo-Yo Ma's quest to uncover Leonard Bernstein's theoretical "universal language of music," and to identify and cultivate the intersections between cultures where harmony connects disparity. Formed in 2000 in the Berkshires, this ensemble may have only existed as a one-off project, but the events of 9/11 motivated the musicians to keep it going and in order to continue to inspire compassion, creativity, understanding and unity despite political conflicts. Featuring archival footage from Ma's career, including his performance as a seven-year-old prodigy in front of President Kennedy and first lady Jacqueline, this discerning and joyous documentary includes many of the backstories of the fascinating ensemble members: Damascus-born clarinetist Kinan Azmeh; Iranian exile and acclaimed kamancheh player, Kayhan Kalhor; Wu Man, master of the Chinese stringed instrument, the pipa; and the exuberant Spanish bagpiper Cristina Pato, known as "the Jimi Hendrix of Galicia."

Morgan Neville (USA, 2015)
96 minutes, Color, In English
Grades 5-12

Recommended Subject Areas:

- Arts/Media
- Asian Studies
- Elementary School
- Ethics/Religion
- History
- Journalism
- Middle School
- Music
- Political Science
- Social Studies
- Women's Studies
- World Affairs



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING TOPICS AND DISCUSSION:

The Music of Strangers tells an uplifting story about a group of musicians who overcome odds to share their talents and their heritage, and to create music at the intersection of cultures.

Before watching, ask students to consider their own experiences with music and with cultural identity.

Do you play an instrument? Do you play alone or with a band or ensemble? How does it feel to play music with other people? Do you enjoy being part of a musical group?

Is music a part of your family life and your cultural heritage? What songs did you grow up listening to? What instruments are important to your culture? What is your family's relationship to music?

You may choose to conduct this exercise in a group discussion or as an individual journaling assignment. Ask students to keep their answers in mind as they watch **The Music of Strangers**.

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION:

Character and Story

1) Describe Yo-Yo Ma.

- What kind of a person is he?
- How did he become a musician?
- Describe Yo-Yo Ma's journey to find his purpose and his passion. What gives him meaning in life?

2) Describe the Silk Road Ensemble.

- What characters did you meet through the course of the film?

- What do these musicians have in common with one another?
- In what ways are they different? How are their experiences different?
- Were there any characters that you identified with?
- Which of the characters' stories moved and surprised you the most?

3) Describe Wu Man's journey from China's Cultural Revolution to the Silk Road orchestra.

- What kind of a person is Wu Man?
- What challenges did she face in her journey?
 - How did she overcome these challenges?
 - Do you admire Wu Man? What qualities about her are admirable?

4) Describe Kayhan Kalhor.

- What changes did you see in him through the course of the film?
- What impact did Iran's revolution have on his life and his view of the world?
 - How did political turmoil and oppression transform his relationship to his country?
 - How did politics and music intersect in Kayhan's experience?

5) What criticism did the Silk Road Ensemble face during the course of the film?

- How did Yo-Yo Ma and the other musicians respond to criticism?
- What were Yo-Yo Ma's original goals in forming the Silk Road Ensemble?
- How did the goals of the project change time progressed?
- Do you think that the Silk Road Ensemble has been successful in achieving its goals?

DESCRIBE THE SILK ROAD ENSEMBLE



Context

1) Where did you travel with this film?

- What countries and regions did you discover through the Silk Road Ensemble?
- What impressions did you have of China, Syria, Iran and Spain before watching the film?
- Did you learn anything new about these countries through the lens of music?

2) Reflect on Kinan Asmeh's experience of living and working in the United States at a time when his home country, Syria, is embedded in a devastating war.

- In what ways did the Syrian war prompt Kinan to question to role of art in the world?
- What does his struggle for meaning and purpose reveal about the relationship between art and politics?
- How did the other musicians in the film examine the role of music and culture in the world? What do they discover?
- What do the musicians of the Silk Road Ensemble do to make a difference in the world?

3) How did the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center change the goals and the conditions of the Silk Road Ensemble?

- What additional challenges did the Ensemble face as a multi-national organization in post 9/11 America?
- How did the Ensemble overcome these challenges?
- What held the project together?

4) Many of the Silk Road Ensemble musicians are living outside of their countries. What do they do to hold onto their cultural heritage?

- Why is it important for these musicians to stay connected with their home cultures?
- What challenges do the musicians experience in living away from the places where they were born? How does it change their sense of self and identity?
- What do the musicians experience when they return to their home countries after years of living abroad?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DO SOMETHING FROM THE HEART?

5) What does it mean to do something from the heart?

- Why is working from the heart especially important for artists?
- What does it mean to find your voice as an artist?
- What did it mean for Yo-Yo Ma to search for his voice?
- What did that process entail for the other artists in the film? How did they find their personal voices?

Style and Message/Reading the Film for Media Literacy

1) What did you think of the music in the film?

- What role did music play in telling the story of the Silk Road Ensemble?
- How did the music included in the film speak to the Ensemble's goals of togetherness and overcoming difference?

2) How does the cinematography reflect and mirror the tone of the music?

- Do you think the imagery in this film is beautiful?
- Where do you see art in the filming?

3) This film covered a span of fifteen years, from the formation of the Silk Road Ensemble in 2000, to the



film's release in 2015. How do the filmmakers show the passage of time?

- What clues did you see in the film to indicate that time was passing?
- 4) Do you think that this film has a message?
- What does **The Music of Strangers** say about art, cultural identity and difference?
 - What does the film say about the mixing of cultures?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

1) Journaling exercise: Review the film.

- Briefly summarize **The Music of Strangers**.
- What are the most important parts of the story?
- What does this film tell us about art and culture?
- Would you recommend this film to your friends and family? Why or why not?

2) Activity: Make Media. Individually or as a group, make a short film featuring a musician.

- Identify a friend or family member who plays an instrument.
- Set up a date and time to record your musician. Use a simple camera and audio recorder—a cell phone is fine—to capture the music and the image of your musician.
- Using the technology you have chosen, edit your interview into a format that you can share. This might be a blog post, a short video, or a podcast.
- Share the interviews in class. Get ready to get inspired!

3) Assignment: Research the music of your own cultural history.

- Talk with a family member about what songs and instruments characterize your culture's traditional music.
- Using resources online and in your school library, research your musical heritage.
- Write a short report on your findings.
- Share your report with the class, or with an appropriate school or community group.

California Media Literacy Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

- **Grade 7:** Standard 1.8 Analyze the effect on the viewer of images, text, and sound in electronic journalism; identify the techniques used to achieve the effects in each instance studied.
- **Grade 8:** Standard 1.9 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, illustrators, news photographers) communicate information and affect impressions and opinions.
- **Grades 9 & 10:** Standard 1.14 Identify the aesthetic effects of a media presentation and evaluate the techniques used to create them (e.g., compare Shakespeare's *Henry V* with Kenneth Branagh's 1990 film version).
- **Grades 9 & 10:** Standard 1.2 Compare and contrast the ways in which media genres (e.g., televised news, news magazines, documentaries, online information) cover the same event.
- **Grades 11 & 12:** Standard 1.1 Recognize strategies used by the media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture (e.g., advertisements; perpetuation of stereotypes; use of visual representations, special effects, language); Standard 1.3 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, documentary filmmakers, illustrators, news photographers).

For more information about media literacy standards in your state, visit:

- MediaLiteracy.com: resources for advancing media education, United States Standards for media literacy education. <http://www.medialiteracy.com/standards.htm>
- Frank W Baker's guide to State Standards Which Include Elements of Media Literacy. http://frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

Common Core Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

This lesson addresses the English and Language Arts standards for Reading Informational Texts grades 9-12. Additional specific standard applications are listed below:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.



MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES

SCREENING WITH MEANING

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive.

Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

- (1) **Medium:** the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
- (2) **Author:** the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
- (3) **Content:** the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
- (4) **Audience:** the target audience to whom it is delivered
- (5) **Purpose:** the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.

CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

MEDIUM	<p>All Media Is Constructed.</p> <p>How is the message delivered and in what format? What technologies are used to present the message? What visual and auditory elements are used? What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?</p>
AUTHOR	<p>All Media Is Constructed by Someone.</p> <p>Who is delivering the message? Who originally constructed the message? What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?</p>
CONTENT	<p>All Media Is A Language.</p> <p>What is the subject of the media message? What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content? What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response? To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?</p>
AUDIENCE	<p>All Media Messages Reach an Audience.</p> <p>Who receives the message? For whom is the message intended? What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message? What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message? How might others perceive this message differently? Why?</p>
PURPOSE	<p>All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.</p> <p>Why was the message constructed? Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How? To what extent does the message achieve its purpose? What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?</p>



THE NON-FICTION FILM WHAT IS A DOCUMENTARY?

A documentary is a film whose goal is to capture truth, fact or reality as seen through the lens of the camera. But there are many kinds of documentaries, and not everyone's idea of truth is the same. The Scottish filmmaker John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in 1926 to describe American filmmaker Robert Flaherty's romanticized culture studies, but nonfiction filmmaking dates back to the earliest motion picture reels.

The definition of documentary expanded as filmmakers experimented with technology and the goals of nonfiction. Avant-garde documentarians, like Dziga Vertov in the 1920s, believed that the mechanical eye of the camera gave a truer image of reality than the human eye and pointed his lens at newly industrialized cities. Leni Reifenstahl's propaganda films from Nazi Germany used the nonfiction form to convey a political message, a slanted truth. The international cinema vérité or observational movements of the 1960s attempted to remove authorship from the documentary. The observational filmmaker hovered like a "fly on the wall" watching the world without commentary. Modern documentaries often seek to raise awareness about a social, environmental or political issue, guiding their audiences toward civic participation and activism.

While watching a documentary, it is important to remember the core concepts of media analysis: who made the film, for what audience and why? The nonfiction format can be deceptively subjective, as all filmmaking involves an inherent selection process: in the images that are shot, the music and narration that accompanies them and, most significantly, the way in which they are all edited together. Media literacy means always analyzing a documentary for its message and authorial intent.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE DOCUMENTARY

- 1895** The Lumiere brothers developed the first motion picture film reels, capturing brief, unedited clips of life around them called "actualities" (e.g., *Train Arriving at the Station*)
- 1900-1920** Travelogue or "Scenic" films became popular, showcasing exoticized images from around the globe.
- 1926** John Grierson coined the term "documentary" to describe Robert Flaherty's romantic nonfiction film, *Moana*.
- 1929** Dziga Vertov, with the Soviet Kino-Pravda movement, released the experimental nonfiction film, *Man With a Movie Camera*.
- 1935** Leni Reifenstahl released *Triumph of the Will*, the infamous propaganda film that chronicled the 1934 Nazi Party Congress.
- 1939** John Grierson collaborated with the Canadian government to form the National Film Board of Canada, with the initial goal of creating Allied propaganda in support of the war.
- 1960s** The cinema vérité movement began in Europe, shortly followed by "direct cinema" in the U.S. Portable cameras and sync sound allowed filmmakers to capture intimate footage with minimal intervention.
- 1968** The Argentine film, *La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces)* opened the door to the activist cinema of the 1970s, which used film as a tool to counter capitalist and neo-colonial politics in Latin America.
- 1988** The US Congress mandated that the US government support the creation of independent non-commercial media, and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) was founded.
- 2000s** The widespread use of digital cameras and editing software made the documentary medium vastly more affordable to independent and amateur filmmakers. Video sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo allowed amateur filmmakers to broadcast their work.
- PRESENT DAY** The term "documentary" has come to encompass a wide range of nonfiction cinema. Contemporary filmmakers continue to push the boundaries of truth in film and to explore new avenues and applications for the medium.



THE MAKING OF A DOCUMENTARY

Idea, Issue, Story.

Even though they are nonfiction films, most modern documentaries structure their content around a traditional story arc, with a beginning, middle and end, as well as characters, and a conclusion, theme or thesis to impart to the audience. Documentary filmmakers begin their projects with an idea or an issue that they wish to explore more deeply. Through research and planning, they develop a comprehensive plan before they begin shooting.

The Production Process.

To capture candid moments on film, modern documentary makers often leave the camera running, collecting far more footage than the final film requires. They may do this during interviews or in observational-style encounters with their subjects. To get increased access and an observational aesthetic, documentary makers often use handheld cameras and natural light, rather than staging a more formal filming environment.

Post-Production and the Documentary.

Because a documentary film relies upon candid footage, a large part of the film's construction occurs in the editing room, where you work with what you've captured. A documentary editor will sift through long interviews just to find a few phrases that will summarize the film's message. To emphasize important points and build the story, some documentaries use a voiceover,

an interview or a scripted narrative that brings candid footage together into a coherent statement. An original score can work alongside the voiceover to unify the footage and shape the mood of the film. Audiences often underestimate the power of sound to generate an emotional response. Many documentaries also use charts, graphs and historical footage to add context and emphasize key points.

Distribution.

Once a film is completed, the filmmaker needs to help it find its audience. Many documentaries are made independently on small budgets, but what's the point of all your work if no one hears your message? Some documentaries will be released in theaters around the country or get programmed on public or cable TV channels, but most documentary filmmakers will start by submitting their work to film festivals, in hopes of attracting distributors for the theater and television markets. Filmmakers may also make their films available online and use social media to reach their target audience.



SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

The Silk Road Project Website:

<http://www.silkroadproject.org/>

.....

Background on The Silk Road Project:

PBS: The Silk Road Ensemble: <http://www.pbs.org/program/silk-road-ensemble/>

Yo Yo Ma's website: <http://www.yo-yoma.com/>

SilkRoad on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/silkroadproject/>

The Washington Post: "Yo Yo Ma brings disparate artists together in his Silk Road Ensemble": <https://www.washingtonpost.com/express/wp/2015/02/26/yo-yo-ma-brings-disparate-cultures-together-in-his-silk-road-ensemble/>

.....

History and Cultural Context:

China's Cultural Revolution: <http://eastasianrc.aspmia.org/teachers-guide-the-cultural-revolution-and-post-mao-china/>

A Jumping Off Point to Discussions About the Syrian Conflict: <http://info.marygrove.edu/MATblog/bid/96663/5-resources-to-teach-students-about-the-Syrian-conflict>

Resources for Teaching the Syrian Refugee Crisis: <http://worldview.unc.edu/resources-for-teaching-the-syrian-refugee-crisis/>

Persepolis: Graphic Novel and Lesson Plan to Discuss Iran's Revolution: <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/pictures-tell-story-improving-1102.html>

Facing History and Ourselves: The Challenges and Opportunities of Teaching 9/11: <http://facingtoday.facinghistory.org/the-challenges-and-opportunities-of-teaching-911>

The Celtic History of Galicia: <http://www.mauiceltic.com/galicia.htm>



REVIEWS

The Hollywood Reporter

12:31 PM PDT 9/19/2015 by John DeFore

An unlikely band of collaborators teams with Yo-Yo Ma to encourage cross-cultural connectivity.

A first-rate music film capturing a restless desire to communicate beyond the boundaries of any single idiom, *The Music of Strangers* watches as Yo-Yo Ma, a giant in the world of Western classical music, puts Bach and Beethoven aside to spend time with his multicultural Silk Road Ensemble. Documentarian Morgan Neville is on quite a roll here, debuting two films at TIFF while his widely praised *Best of Enemies* still lingers in theatrical release. Though this picture doesn't have the element of discovery that made his *Twenty Feet from Stardom* a box-office hit and Oscar-winner, it will play very well on HBO and is a rich enough experience to benefit from big-screen bookings.

Many viewers will be surprised to hear the cellist speak of never having really committed to music, of having simply “fallen into” the career because his gifts were so obvious in childhood. (We see footage of Leonard Bernstein introducing the prodigy on TV at age 7.) Friend John Williams observes that, for a wunderkind, the challenge is finding ways to keep one's interest up, and early in Ma's career he began addressing that question, teaming with everyone from Hot Club legend Stephane Grappelli to the acrobatic vocalist Bobby McFerrin in his search for what Bernstein called a universal musical language.

But Ma found an enduring outlet for his curiosity with the Silk Road Project, gathering virtuosos from Spain to Syria, putting practitioners of very different traditions in rooms together to see what kind of music they'd make together. Neville offers footage from the first meetings of the amorphous group, at Tanglewood in 2000, described at the time as a “Manhattan Project of music.” It might have been a one-off experiment, we're told, but the events of the following year made it seem all the more important to build bridges between cultures that know little of each other.

The film spends most of its time not on a history of this project — frustratingly, we don't even get much insight into how new works are composed for the core performing group — but on a handful of its most colorful members. We meet Wu Man, master of the Chinese stringed instrument called the pipa; Damascus-born clarinetist Kinan Azmeh; Iranian exile Kayhan Kalhor, who plays the bowed kamancheh; and the ebullient bagpiper Cristina Pato, “the Jimi Hendrix of Galicia.”

Viewers who are as curious about music as Ma is will wish, probably, for a little more examination of the exotic instruments we encounter here — of how they work, maybe even how they evolved. But the mainstream-minded Neville is smart to focus on the players' stories, which often involve political unrest and reluctant immigration, and on following them around in the world. Kalhor's biography is most poignant: We're with him in May 2009 as he lives and teaches in Iran, telling the camera “I can't imagine moving abroad again.” The next month, fallout over political protests forces him to do just that.

Woven among these personal narratives, of course, are scenes of music — from aching laments to



CLASSROOM GUIDE

ABOUT THE FILM
USING THIS GUIDE
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES
STANDARDS ALIGNMENT
MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES
SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES
ARTICLES AND REVIEWS

boisterous party jams. This is not a performance film, so unfortunately we rarely hear a complete song. But the spirit of hybrid creativity is infectious enough to inspire the uninitiated to seek out the group's albums. They've made six so far — and if the onward-and-upward tone of this idealistic doc is to be believed, they're a long way from stopping.

POV Magazine

by Patrick Mullen

This year's Toronto International Film Festival puts the emphasis back on "International" with the festival's increased scope of world cinema reaching over seventy countries. The inaugural Platform sidebar adds a streak of international competitiveness, too, as does the range of stars competing for headlines. Nowhere else in the festival, however, might one find a better spirit of global interconnection than in the wonderful TIFF Docs selection *The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble*. The film marks another return to a musical subject for director Morgan Neville following his Oscar-winning *20 Feet from Stardom* and this cinematic opus is another impressive entry for the director, who is already having a great year with the Hot Docs hit *Best of Enemies* and the rock doc *Under the Influence: Keith Richards* also screening at the festival.

Music of Strangers offers a fine companion piece to *20 Feet from Stardom* as Neville draws a series of voices together into one unified chorus. The film weaves a musical tapestry of cultures and accents as Neville chronicles the foundation of the Silk Road Ensemble by renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma. The Silk Road Ensemble brings together a troupe of dedicated musicians from different corners of the globe, who all play instruments that reflect the cultural identities of their respective

countries. China's Wu Man plays the pipa while Spain's Cristina Pato brings the bagpipes and lots of vitality. Kayhan Kalhor represents Iran with the kamancheh and Kinan Azmeh reps Syria with the clarinet. The four are core members in addition to a larger troupe of talented and diverse musicians who bring their respective accents to the ensemble as it travels the globe. The ensemble is a collision of cultures and the sound couldn't be better: *The Music of Strangers* is a symphony for the eyes and ears alike. As the wonderful music swells, the film offers a world tour of sights and sounds that can't be beat.

Neville structures the film similarly to the narrative scale of *Twenty Feet from Stardom* by starting with his key subject, Yo-Yo Ma, and charting his rise, significance, and passion. Segments chronicling similar traits of each of the core members follow, but Neville finds valuable dramatic weight in all their narratives as Silk Road comes together as each member experiences significant turning points in his or her respective countries. Economic hardships rock Spain for Pato's family while Kalhor speaks of the revolution in Iran and Wu Man relates her experience growing up as a fortunate student in post-Maoist China. Each musician harnesses and celebrates cultural identities, and Silk Road empowers the musicians by sharing their cultures with peers from around the world. The music reclaims an aspect of culture that finds resistance both at home and abroad, such as Kalhor's story of cancelled concerts in Iran or of Azmeh's ability to connect with students at Syrian refugee camps through music.

The film sandwiches these storylines in between grand musical numbers that show the Silk Road Ensemble in its full force. It's one thing to hear the members speak of the revelatory cultural fusion that happens in their performances, but it's an entirely more powerful experience to hear it. Sequences with



Pato's energetic bagpipes are especially enthralling. This music is both familiar and new as the ensemble shares different elements of diverse cultures, such as using traditional instruments from one country to play a song from another. The result is not a clash of cultures, but a wonderful harmony.

Neville shoots the musical scenes impeccably. The performances in *The Music of Strangers* are just as impressive as the showstopping numbers of *Twenty Feet from Stardom* are, thanks to the bright and involving cinematography by Graham Wiloughby (Neville's *Stardom* DP) that fluidly weaves around the musicians as they play in cities throughout the world. The performances are expertly staged, yet have the thrill of spontaneity. Each number plays like a wild fusion of classical music and jazz as the camera, musicians, and passersby jam and groove to the music. The soundtrack alone is worth the admission.

The Music of Strangers juxtaposes the harmony of the band with the personal storylines as they converge to Silk Road's peak in a post 9/11 world characterized by rampant xenophobia and fraught conversations on nationalism. The music, however, underscores the foundational philosophy of the ensemble that teaches audiences to appreciate how each culture blends in a sonorous accord. Despite their perceived differences, the flavours of one culture complement those of another when everyone plays the same tune. The film is an inspiring account of the arts ability to break barriers and change the world as Neville follows the Silk Road Ensemble across borders and through genres to find a common voice sung and heard around the globe. This symphonic film mixes world cinema and world music to create its own beautiful harmony.