



Yo-Yo Ma: His Cello, His Life, and His Music

Yo-Yo Ma is one of the world's greatest and most popular cellists. He has been an international star since he was a teenager. Mr. Ma performs in many different ways and styles. He is a fine soloist, a respected member of chamber groups, and an outstanding soloist with an orchestra. He plays many kinds of music, from the works of the 1600s to the works of modern composers. He explores classical and folk music, as well as traditional Chinese music.

Mr. Ma was born in Paris in 1955 to Chinese-born parents. His father, a musicologist, began teaching Mr. Ma to play the cello when he was four years old. When he was five years old he gave his first cello recital. In 1963 when Mr. Ma was nine, his father moved his family to New York City so he could study at the Julliard School of Music. He made his Carnegie Hall debut when he was nine years old. When he was 15, many people heard him perform for the first time with the famous conductor Leonard Bernstein.

Mr. Ma went to Harvard University for a liberal arts education, graduating with a B.A. in 1976. In the summers, he performed at the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont. He became a full-time cellist after he graduated from college. In 1978 he won the Avery Fisher Prize, which is given to very few of the world's best musicians.

Because the cello repertoire is limited, Mr. Ma has commissioned new cello works and experimented with new forms. He has recorded more than 75 albums and has won 14 Grammy Awards. His recordings are diverse. For example, in addition to his classical music recordings, he has also made two country-style albums: *Appalachian Waltz* and *Appalachian Journey*. He is also featured on *Lullie, the Iceburg*, a children's album that contains a musical tale about the environment.

In 2000, he worked with a Chinese composer on the soundtrack of the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which won the Academy Award for Best Original Score.

He also founded the *Silk Road Project* in 2001, which studies the cultural, artistic, and intellectual traditions along Marco Polo's ancient Silk Road (a set of trading routes that connected Europe and Asia). With his Silk Road Project, Mr. Ma hopes to connect the musical cultures of the United States, Europe, and Asia. Mr. Ma wants to show how music and cultures from these different parts of the world can mix and influence each other.

Mr. Ma and his wife Jill, have two children, Nicholas and Emily. He plays two very old cellos: a Davidoff Stradivarius and a Montagnana. The Davidoff Stradivarius was made in 1712 and once belonged to another famous cellist named Jacqueline du Pre. The Montagnana cello was made in Venice in 1733.

Mr. Ma is a cellist who is always searching for new ways to communicate with audiences. He wants to grow personally and to renew himself. Whenever he plays music, he tries "to find connections that stimulate the imagination."

Sources:

- [The World of Yo-Yo Ma](#)
- [Silver Burdette Music](#)