

Yo-Yo Ma breaks new ground in the digital world

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Digital Sales of Appassionato - His First Sony Classical Release in Two Years - Eclipse CD Sales

Sony BMG Masterworks is proud to announce that legendary recording artist Yo-Yo Ma is the first in the label's history to have an album sell more digital copies than CDs in its first week. Released on January 9, the Grammy-winning cellist's Sony Classical recording *Appassionato* also enjoyed the all-time highest percentage of first week digital sales for a Billboard Top 200 release on SONY BMG. The album peaked at No. 2 on iTunes' overall album charts and finished the week at #4 with 57.1% of all sales being digital.

The strong digital numbers helped propel this recording to the #1 spot on Billboard's Top Classical chart and #79 on Billboard's Top 200. In addition, the CD peaked at the #1 position on Amazon.com's classical chart and #15 on the overall album chart during its initial week.

Yo-Yo Ma begins 2007 with a new focus on the opportunities afforded in the digital world, and to this end Sony Classical has created a podcast series based around this album, to be featured on iTunes' podcast page. In addition, as part of the label's commitment to Yo-Yo Ma, his entire catalog is now available for digital purchase.

Appassionato is a journey through some of the world's most romantic music -- from Mendelssohn to Gershwin to John Williams. It is something of an event in the recording industry, as it marks Yo-Yo Ma's first release since *The Essential Yo-Yo Ma* appeared in August 2005. With a release date so close to Valentine's Day, *Appassionato* seems an ideal choice as a gift for music lovers.

Many of the works featured on *Appassionato* have come to be closely identified with Yo-Yo Ma. His impassioned, intensely lyrical performing style -- many critics have noted that his playing "sings," and more than a few opera stars have named him as an influence in their own careers -- illuminates treasured classics such as the Largo from Vivaldi's "Winter," "The Swan" from Saint-Saens's *Carnival of the Animals*, and the Allegretto poco mosso from Franck's *Sonata in A minor* (with pianist Kathryn Stott). *Appassionato*'s musical bounty also includes the Andante con moto from Gershwin's *Prelude No. 2*, Bandolim's *Doce de Coco*, the Largo from Kabalevsky's *Concerto No. 1 in G minor*, "First Impressions" from *Appalachia Waltz* (the acclaimed collaboration with fiddler Mark O'Connor and bassist and Sony Classical artist Edgar Meyer), the Andante from Brahms' *Double Concerto in A minor* (with violinist Isaac Stern), and two works by Ennio Morricone, "Nostalgia" and an excerpt from "Gabriel's Oboe."

Appassionato also features three selections that Ma has recorded for the first time: Michio Mamiya's Finnish Folk Song No. 4, "Mikin Pekko," Piazzolla's "Soledad," and Mendelssohn's immortal "Songs Without Words" with Emanuel Ax. In addition, Zhao's "Swallow Song" has been specially re-recorded for this album. It first appeared on Silk Road Journeys: Beyond The Horizon. Another high point is John Williams's "Going to School" from the popular 2005 film *Memoirs of a Geisha*. In addition to Ma, this selection features the multiple Academy Award-winning composer in a rare appearance on piano. "Going to School" was initially available as an iTunes exclusive during the movie's release, and this marks its first time on a commercially available CD.

While Ma has chosen the works in *Appassionato* to represent various aspects of love, they also symbolize another type of love, namely Yo-Yo Ma's passion for performing music with friends. *Appassionato* unfolds as a kind of musical memoir, pairing the cellist with many of the great influences and collaborators of his career. In a never-before published interview included in the CD booklet, Ma recalls many of his famous artistic partnerships. One of his most celebrated collaborations is with pianist Emanuel Ax, who joins him on *Appassionato* for "Song Without Words." The two men have been friends and colleagues for thirty-five years. "I thought this album would not be complete if Manny wasn't part of it," says Ma. "We know each other's timing. We kind of feel it. It's a brother kind of thing."

An exclusive Sony Classical artist, Yo-Yo Ma has amassed an army of admirers via his vast recording legacy. With a CD catalogue of astonishing breadth and depth, he has consistently been one of the top-selling classical artists in the world. His recordings have earned him a total of fifteen Grammy Awards. His lively appearances on a wide range of television programs, from *The West Wing* to *The Tonight Show* to *Sesame Street*, have earned him a reputation as the most exciting ambassador for classical music since Leonard Bernstein. He can be heard on the soundtrack recordings of several major feature films, including *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* and *Memoirs of a Geisha*. In 1998, he established The Silk Road Project, designed to shed light on the synthesis of cultural ideas along the famous Silk Road. Yo-Yo Ma's website can be accessed at <http://www.yo-yoma.com/>.

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