

Immigrant Recipients of 2013 Vilcek Prizes Announced

*Yo-Yo Ma, and Richard Flavell with Ruslan Medzhitov
take \$100,000 Prizes*

Six artists and scientists win \$35,000 Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise

New York, NY - February 5, 2013 - The Vilcek Foundation is pleased to announce the winners of the eighth annual Vilcek Prizes, recognizing immigrant contributions to the American arts and sciences. The Vilcek Prize for the Arts, this year focusing on the field of contemporary music, is awarded to Mr. Yo-Yo Ma. The Vilcek Prize for Biomedical Science will be shared this year by two winners, Drs. Richard A. Flavell and Ruslan Medzhitov. The prizes include a cash award of \$100,000 each.

The Vilcek Prize for Contemporary Music goes to Mr. Ma, born in France to Chinese parents, who first established himself as a master classical cellist. He has cultivated a daring versatility in his repertoire, branching into genres as diverse as tango, bluegrass, and Chinese, Japanese, and Central Asian folk music. Mr. Ma is also 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 around the world. While Mr. Ma is widely recognized as a living legend in the world of classical music, the Vilcek Prize in Contemporary Music is the first major award recognizing his contributions to contemporary music.

Drs. Flavell and Medzhitov, both professors at Yale University School of Medicine and investigators with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, are being recognized for their work in the field of immunology, most notably for their contribution to the understanding of the innate immune system, the host defense system that detects hostile pathogens in the body and triggers a response from the adaptive immune system. In addition to broadening fundamental knowledge of the human immune response, the research opened up new possibilities for treating immune-related disorders and diseases. Dr. Flavell is originally from the United Kingdom, and Dr. Medzhitov, from Uzbekistan.

The Vilcek Foundation is also announcing the winners of the Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise, established to recognize a younger generation of immigrant artists and scientists who have distinguished themselves early in their careers. Created five years ago, this is the first year that three winners have been selected in each category, with the awards increasing to \$35,000 each.

In contemporary music, the Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise were awarded to music professionals aged 30 and under.

James “JHart” Abrahart - JHart, as he is professionally known, is a British-born songwriter. He was signed to Universal Music in 2010, and since then has penned tracks for pop, hip-hop, and R&B superstars such as Justin Bieber, Trey Songz, Jason Derulo, Flo Rida, and David Guetta. His songs have appeared on iTunes and Billboard charts, and in 2012, he co-wrote and featured on a track with DJ Paul Oakenfold, “Surrender,” which reached #3 on the Billboard Dance charts.

Samuel Bazawule – Performing under the stage name Blitz the Ambassador, the Ghanaian-born MC, producer, and composer is seeking out the intersections between American hip-hop and West African musical traditions. He is backed by a horn section, the Embassy Ensemble, raps fluently in English and Twi (a dialect of Ghana), and mixes in funk, afrobeat, and Highlife influences. He has put out two albums and one EP, the most recent being the well-received *Native Sun*.

Tigran – Although trained as a classical and jazz pianist, Armenian-born Tigran is just as inspired by Armenian folk music, Indian classical music, beatboxing, funk, poetry and more. He has recorded five albums, and received a French Grammy for *A Fable*, which is a solo album skillfully blending Armenian folk music and jazz traditions. Tigran was the first place winner in the Thelonious Monk Jazz Piano Competition in 2006 and second place winner in the Martial Solal International Jazz Competition the same year, among other honors.

The Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Biomedical Sciences are awarded to foreign-born scientists aged 38 or younger, holding independent positions in an academic or research institution.

Dr. Hashim Al-Hashimi – Born in Lebanon, Dr. Al-Hashimi develops methods that combine nuclear magnetic resonance and computational approaches to visualize the dynamics of cellular molecules and processes, such as DNA replication, at an atomic level. Analysis of his first target twelve years ago, the HIV RNA molecule, revealed that RNA structures were not static, as believed at the time. Instead, they morphed into various structures, each with a distinct function. This opened the possibility of RNA-based therapeutic treatments. Dr. Al-Hashimi is the J. Lawrence Oncley Collegiate Professor of Chemistry and Biophysics at the University of Michigan.

Dr. Michael Rape – German-born Dr. Rape is an associate professor at University of California, Berkeley, where he investigates ubiquitylation: the process by which a small molecule, termed ubiquitin, is attached to cellular proteins to control cell proliferation and differentiation. Although ubiquitylation is present in all cells, the specifics are not well understood, and Dr. Rape's research has provided insight into the molecular mechanisms involved. He is also researching ubiquitylation-targeted treatments for cancer and other diseases.

Dr. Joanna Wysocka – Polish-born Dr. Wysocka, associate professor at Stanford University, investigates the epigenetic mechanisms that direct differentiation of stem cells in human embryos into specialized tissues. Her research, centered on embryonic stem cells and neural crest cells, illuminated the role of chromatin in maintaining the pluripotency of human stem cells, which has broad implications for the development of regenerative medicine. Dr. Wysocka's lab also studies how instructions encoded by the genome are interpreted in the context of a cellular state and signaling milieu to establish cell type-specific gene expression.

The prizewinners will be honored at a ceremony at the Mandarin Oriental in New York City in early April 2013. Bob Santelli, executive director of The GRAMMY Museum, will present the music prizes, while Titia de Lange, Leon Hess Professor at Rockefeller University and former Vilcek Prize winner, will present the science prizes. For more information, please visit 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 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.