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**YO-YO MA, DAMIAN WOETZEL & FRIENDS VISIT SPECIAL CENTER ON SKID  
ROW TO LEAD WORKSHOP, DEMONSTRATION FOR 160 LAUSD STUDENTS**

*Inner-City Arts Students Welcome Two of President Obama's Arts Ambassadors*

Los Angeles, Calif. – It seemed like just another typical day at Inner-City Arts, the arts education campus located in the heart of Skid Row, with yellow buses arriving in the morning filled with several enthusiastic classes of elementary school kids from public schools nearby, filing into studios led by professional artists giving hands-on instruction in the visual and performing arts.

But, this Tuesday, April 5 was different. World-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma, fresh from wowing audiences the night before at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in a performance with his Silk Road Ensemble, and ballet star turned director/producer Damian Woetzel arrived at Inner-City Arts with special friends in tow to show that the love of music and dance is a language that can be spoken by everyone.

Ma and Woetzel, members of The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, spent the morning working with a class of 4<sup>th</sup> graders from Charles Kim Elementary School, then visited different classrooms at Inner-City Arts to perform and talk with the students (2<sup>nd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> graders) and their teachers before bringing the entire campus together at its Rosenthal Theater for a rousing performance that left many children exclaiming with amazement.

Although Ma and Woetzel served as the experienced statesmen of the performing world, they graciously introduced a rising star that mesmerized the students with his artistic feats. Charles "Lil Buck" Riley, who came to Woetzel's attention after someone forwarded his Facebook page, demonstrated his artistry in jookin', a street dance that originated in Memphis, Tennessee. Riley led the fourth graders in a short dance, then accompanied by the musicians, performed his own complex improvisational dance to Saint-Saens' The Swan.

(more)

When one of the students asked him to perform a “moonwalk,” Riley good-naturedly complied, with Yo-Yo Ma and the other musicians performing a classical music version of “Billie Jean,” all to wild applause.

Silk Road Ensemble members Christina Pato, a lively Galician bagpiper, and cellist Mike Block were joined on stage by piano player Daniel Vargas, an Inner-City Arts alum, and 16-year-old violinist Victor Ekpo, a student at charter school Renaissance Arts Academy, with longtime Inner-City Arts dance instructor Paula Perlman leading the students in warming up for their demonstration.

When a student named America asked a question at the end of the demonstration about what encouraged the performers when they were young to begin devoting themselves to their art, each performer talked about being 4 or 5 years old and knowing that they loved to dance, or to make music. But the students really took notice when 16-year-old Ekpo, who played his violin alongside Ma and his cello, said he only learned to play the violin when he was 13 years old.

So, another day ended at Inner-City Arts, but the next day would bring more buses, and more children, to receive, at no cost, the free twice-weekly arts instruction that encourages them to learn and achieve in school, and encourage them to reach for a brighter future.

When Ma was packing up his cello to leave Inner-City Arts, he said, “I am incredibly inspired by what’s going on in this building, that’s been going on for decades.” As someone who has visited the center before, Ma has seen firsthand the life-affirming benefits of having a place that puts the power and beauty of the arts in children’s hands.

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[About Inner-City Arts – www.inner-cityarts.org](http://www.inner-cityarts.org)

Inner-City Arts is a learning oasis in the heart of Skid Row where professional artists teach students in a real studio environment. Founded in 1989, Inner-City Arts works in partnership with the Los Angeles Unified School District to bring elementary and middle school students to its campus during the school day for instruction in visual arts, ceramics, music, dance, drama and animation. High school students participate in after-school and Saturday programs, while teachers come for training in arts-based instruction.