



FirstWorks Selected for International Program to Bridge Cultural Divide Between American and Muslim Societies

***Caravanserai: A place where cultures meet* Funded with \$1M from Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art**

Managed by Arts Midwest on behalf of Nation's Regional Arts Organizations

Providence, RI – July 27, 2011 -- [FirstWorks](#) is in the vanguard of a new international program aimed at establishing greater understanding between American and Muslim societies.

Caravanserai: A place where cultures meet is a groundbreaking artistic and cultural exchange program meant to showcase the diversity of contemporary Islamic societies through their art and culture.

Caravanserai is led by [Arts Midwest](#), the non-profit regional arts organization (RAO) serving America's upper mid-west on behalf of the nation's six [Regional Arts Organizations](#).

Caravanserai is funded by a one million dollar grant from the [Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art](#) (DDFIA) Building Bridges program.

FirstWorks successfully applied to be one of five pilot organizations in the nation for *Caravanserai*, which will launch in October 2011. Nearly two years in the making, *Caravanserai: A place where cultures meet* begins with a pilot program in five US cities, including Providence.

The pilot program will focus on music and film from Pakistan and will feature compelling contemporary vocal and instrumental music as well as an award winning Pakistani filmmaker.

Future programming will feature other geographic regions and artistic disciplines and will travel to more cities in the United States. For video and music clips from this season and additional information on the *Caravanserai* program, go to www.caravanserai-arts.org/.

“Caravanserai builds on FirstWorks’ mission to connect Providence audiences with peak experiences in the arts,” stated Kathleen Pletcher, Executive Artistic Director of FirstWorks. “Each of the three ‘mini-festivals’ FirstWorks will present this season features virtuoso artists, acclaimed in their native land but unknown to many Americans in exhilarating performances, workshops and open dialogue. This is a once-in-lifetime opportunity to experience 700 year-old traditions intersecting with contemporary expressions in a euphoric experience, distant from the turmoil of the present.”

“The City of Providence is honored to have the opportunity to be part of Caravanserai – and to be at the forefront of such a dynamic, international cultural exchange,” said Lynne McCormack, Director, Office of Art, Culture + Tourism, City of Providence. “The department of Art, Culture + Tourism views its partnership with FirstWorks as an important contribution to the

creative conversations taking place, locally, nationally and across the globe, about the vital role arts and culture play in our collective social and economic futures.”

“The name *Caravanserai* was carefully selected for this program,” said David Fraher, Executive Director of Arts Midwest. “Historically, in the east and middle-east, stopping places for caravans were called caravanserais. Safe places to sit around the fire, come together, and exchange stories. The name evokes that imagery of travelers in a safe haven, in a place where cultures meet. We’re delighted that FirstWorks is providing one of those stopping places for an exciting cultural experience.”

Betsy Fader of the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, says *Caravanserai* is a natural fit for DDFIA’s Building Bridges grants program. “*Caravanserai* beautifully illustrates our mission to promote the use of art and culture to improve Americans’ understanding and appreciation of Muslim Societies. We believe this pilot program of music and film will start many conversations and open many doors to understanding.”

Caravanserai will come to Providence in November and will include three arts residencies including two week-long musical residency tours starting this November with Qawal Najmuddin Saifuddin & Brothers, and continuing in spring 2012 with Tari Khan Ensemble and Arif Lohar featuring Sanam Marvi.

Caravanserai also will include a residency with Pakistani filmmaker Ayesha Khan in February 2012. South Arts, the RAO serving the southeastern US is managing the film component of *Caravanserai*.

FirstWorks will have several announcements in the coming months regarding specific *Caravanserai* events throughout Providence including Powerhouse Drumming and Voices of Lahore and Karachi. The public performance will be November 5, 8:00 p.m. at the RISD Auditorium. Tickets are \$10, advance purchase, \$15, day of performance. Tickets go on sale August 15 at first-works.org or by calling 401-421-4281.

The complete *Caravanserai* tour includes:

- ❖ **The Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire; Littleton, NH**
- ❖ **Artswego SUNY Oswego; Oswego, NY**
- ❖ **FirstWorks; Providence, RI**
- ❖ **Monmouth University; West Long Branch, NJ**
- ❖ **The Myrna Loy Center; Helena, MT**

About FirstWorks:

Beginning with an unprecedented collaboration with Providence’s Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, FirstWorks was launched in 2004 as a vehicle to build community, reach underserved audiences, and present extraordinary arts programs that elevate Providence’s national profile. In the seven years since, FirstWorks has produced 21 groundbreaking arts festivals, attracted more than 95,000 participants, presented over 300 international artists and innovators, engaged more

than 100 nonprofit community organizations and schools, and grown into a multidimensional arts organization recognized with eleven National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grants. For more information, go to www.first-works.org.

About Arts Midwest

Arts Midwest promotes creativity, nurtures cultural leadership, and engages people in meaningful arts experiences, bringing vitality to Midwest communities and enriching people's lives.

About Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art Building Bridges:

The Building Bridges Program aims to promote the use of arts and media to improve Americans' understanding of Muslim societies. The program seeks to support initiatives that use arts and media to highlight the diversity of Muslim populations around the world.

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