

Symposium looks at the culture of the Silk Road

By Beth Ashley

U.S. senior feature writer

A TRIP ALONG the Silk Road, past and present: That's the intellectual treat being offered to the public tomorrow and Saturday by a San Francisco cultural organization called Humanities West.

Humanities West has offered two-day symposia on the history and culture of major epochs and world regions since 1983.

The May program, titled "Venice to Xaniadu, Marco Polo's Silk Road," is one of the richest ever, says executive director Nancy Buffum. The program, to be presented by top

American artists and scholars, will be presented tomorrow night and all day Saturday at Herbst Theater, 401 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco.

Attendees tomorrow night will



MARCO POLO

experience music from Marco Polo's Venice, dance from Central Asia, and throat singing from Tuva, done by blues virtuoso Paul Pena, as well as an introductory lecture to the Silk Road by scholar S. Frederick Starr, chairman of the Central Asian Studies Institute at Johns Hopkins University. Saturday's program has five parts:

▶ (Morning) A lecture by Dr. Albert Dien of Stanford Univer-

sity on the array of cultures that have existed along the road once ruled by the Mongols.

▶ Columbia University scholar Morris Rossabi will show slides and read lively accounts of the first travelers who made their way between Europe and East Asia.

▶ (After lunch) Laurel Victoria Gray, director of the Silk Road Dance Company of Washington, D.C., will present a feast of costume, dance movement and music from Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kurdistan and Bukhara.

▶ Art historian Lauren Arnold See Silk Road, page 9

Silk Road

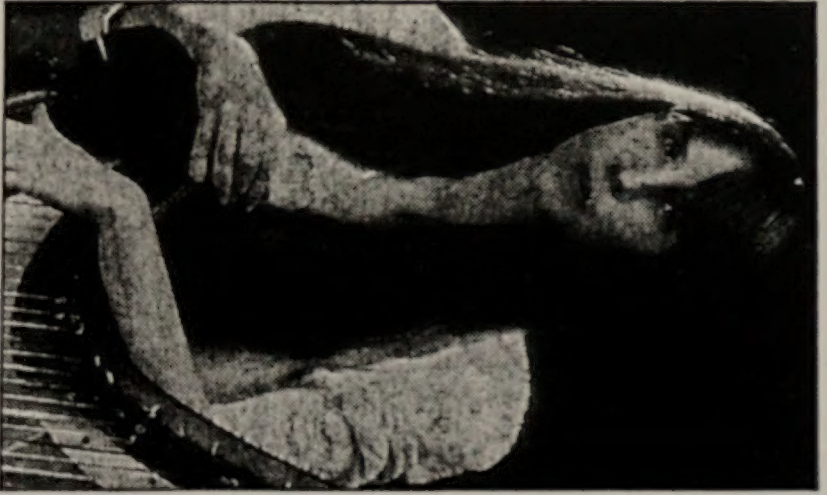
From page 2

will show some of the lavish gifts that were exchanged by medieval diplomats, merchants and missionaries along the Silk Road in ancient times: "We'll see how European art influenced Chinese art, and how Chinese art influenced European," says Buffum.

▶ The program will conclude with a panel discussion: "Did Marco Polo really reach China?"

Admission to the two-day program is \$55, or \$30 for one of the two days. Tickets are available at City Box Office, 180 Redwood St., Suite 100, San Francisco 94102; phone, 392-4400; or fax, 986-0411.

The Marco Polo program is the third in this year's series, which focussed last fall on New Orleans in 1900 (the birth of jazz) and in winter on Rome in the Year 1.



Humanities West was founded in 1983 at the instigation of harpichordist Elaine Thorn-



ARTS OF THE SILK ROAD: Harpist Cheryl Ann Fulton (left) will play medieval Venetian music tomorrow night. Also tomorrow, Paul Peña (above) will do Tuvan throat-singing.

burgh, with a group of fellow artists who wanted to bring the arts and history out of the ivory tower. If people came to learn about history, she believed, they

would also learn about music.

The first program, held in Berkeley, was called "Venice In Glorious Decline." Subsequent programs ranged in fare from "Jerusalem Through the Ages" to "The Harlem Renaissance."

"We pick a city or a great figure in history or an artistic movement, and study the roots of Western civilization and culture," says Buffum.

Each program is multidisciplinary, introducing architecture, performing arts, social history, and fine and decorative arts.

Next season's programs are already in the planning. They include:

- ▶ Oct. 12 and 13 — "Michelangelo's World"
- ▶ Feb. 8 and 9, 2002 — "One Hundred Years in Barcelona."

▶ May 2002 — "Ancient Egypt: Rediscovering the Splendid Realm."

Tickets for the series cost \$155. To order, call Humanities West, 391-9700.

Beth Ashley can be e-mailed at bashley@mariny.com.