



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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*Ancient sounds, contemporary voices...*

## **To the Singers of Tales**

**Serbian singer and performance artist Svetlana Spajić joins Kitka  
for three concerts featuring techniques of oral poetry  
dating back to the time of Homer**



Self-portrait of Svetlana Spajić

**January 27-29, 2012**

**@CounterPULSE**, 1310 Mission Street, San Francisco

*Presented as part of CounterPULSE's Winter Special*

[counterpulse.org/calendar/winter-special-2012/](http://counterpulse.org/calendar/winter-special-2012/)

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, December 20, 2011 – In her Bay Area debut, Serbian singer and performance artist Svetlana Spajić, featured earlier this year in Robert Wilson's *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, joins internationally renowned women's vocal ensemble Kitka in a new vocal-theater work exploring the power and sophistication of ancient oral traditions.

Spajić's artistic work is dedicated to the preservation and transmission of a set of oral practices and traditions that descend back in time more than 3000 years. What did the world of Homer sound like? How did its bards compose and recite its stories? Albert Lord's seminal work on the subject, *The Singer of Tales* (1960), is rooted in a study of contemporary Yugoslav folk poets whom he and his colleague Millman Parry discovered to be still practicing oral formulas as a means of creating their songs and epics. Next year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lord's birth, and Spajić's performance with Kitka, entitled *To the Singers of Tales*, is in part an homage to his book and its now generally accepted theory of "oral-formulaic composition".

For over two decades Spajić has traveled her native Serbia and the surrounding Balkans, carefully researching and recording the songs and stories of the villagers she meets. Her work there has been mutually beneficial. Following the end of the Balkan wars in the 1990s, Spajić found many of the elders had stopped singing, and her time with them has been credited with breaking their period of mournful silence.

Spajić has gone on to collaborate with a number of contemporary artists including Marina Abramović and Boris Kovač to name only two. Her residency with Kitka next month, will begin with a public workshop on Sunday, January 15. In this workshop, taking place at Oakland's Musically Minded Academy, Spajić will offer an introduction to traditional Serbian singing and ancient techniques of oral poetry. One of the goals of this workshop as well as Spajić's series of master classes with Kitka is to demonstrate how these techniques can be a source of contemporary song-making and innovation. Registration for Spajić's public workshop is available online at [www.brownpapertickets.com/event/217425](http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/217425).

At the end of Spajić's residency she will give a series of three performances with Kitka taking place at CounterPULSE in San Francisco, January 27-29. The first half of each concert will be devoted to a solo performance by Spajić entitled *Dedication to the Setting Sun*, a work about her efforts to save from obsolescence the ancient oral traditions rooted in her homeland. Kitka will then join Spajić onstage in a performance to be developed together during Spajić's residency.

#### **About Svetlana Spajić**

Since 1993, Svetlana Spajić has been performing and teaching traditional Serbian and Balkan songs. Recognized as one of the world's foremost authorities on the ancient, orally transmitted vocal traditions of Serbia and the Balkans, Spajić has made her special expertise the study of non-tempered a cappella singing and its unique vocal techniques and ornamentation. Her research in the subject has led her to travel the Balkans, studying firsthand with the best village singers. She has gone on to collaborate with some of the best traditional singers of the world including Hronis Aidonidis, Domna Samiou, Yanka Rupkina, and Bokan Stankovic. Other notable artists with whom she has performed are Marina Abramović, Boris Kovač, Stella Chiweshe, Balkan Beat Box, Sainkho Namchylak, Anthony, and Boban Marković. Spajić has performed at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the MoMA in New York, the Grotowski Institute in Poland, and the Manchester International Festival in England, among many others.

#### **About Kitka**

Kitka is an American women's vocal arts ensemble inspired by traditional songs and vocal techniques from Eastern Europe. The Oakland-based octet has earned international recognition for its distinctive sound, exploring a vast palette of ancient yet contemporary-sounding vocal effects. The ensemble's earthy to ethereal timbres evoke an astonishing range of subtle to extreme inner states, instincts, and emotions. Kitka's commitment to presenting traditional song as a living and evolving expressive art form has led to adventurous collaborations with some of the world's most exciting indigenous musicians and contemporary composers. Currently celebrating its 31st season, Kitka began as a grassroots group of amateur singers from diverse ethnic and musical backgrounds who shared a passion for the stunning dissonances, asymmetric rhythms, intricate ornamentation, and resonant strength of traditional Eastern European women's vocal music. Since its informal beginnings, the group

has evolved into an award-winning touring ensemble known for its artistry, versatility, and mastery of the demanding techniques of regional vocal styling, as well as for its innovative explorations in new music for women's voices. The ensemble's wide-ranging performance, teaching, and recording activities have exposed millions to the haunting beauty of their unique repertoire. Kitka's ensemble for the 2011-2012 season includes: Kelly Atkins, Caitlin Tabancay Austin, Leslie Bonnett, Briget Boyle, Shira Cion, Janet Kutulas, Elizabeth Setzer, Michele Simon, and Corinne Sykes.

*This collaboration between Svetlana Spajić and Kitka is supported, in part, by grants from The Alliance for California Traditional Arts Living Cultures Program, CEC Artslink Independent Projects, The California Arts Council Creating Public Value Program, and the City of Oakland Cultural Funding Program.*

## Calendar Editors, Please Note:

### WHAT:

Kitka and guest artist Svetlana Spajić bring to life ancient Balkan oral traditions in *To the Singers of Tales*.

### WHEN & WHERE:

**Sunday, Jan. 15 | Oakland, CA**

Community Vocal Workshop with Svetlana Spajić

1:30 – 6pm @ Musically Minded Academy

5776 Broadway

Registration: \$50 (Visit: [brownpapertickets.com/event/217425](http://brownpapertickets.com/event/217425).)

**Fri.-Sun., Jan.27-29 | San Francisco, CA**

World premiere: *To the Singers of Tales*

8pm @ CounterPULSE

1310 Mission Street

Tickets: \$22 in advance/\$25 at the door (Visit: [singersoftales.eventbrite.com/.](http://singersoftales.eventbrite.com/))

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Hi-Res photos of Kitka: [kitka.org/press/photos.html](http://kitka.org/press/photos.html)

Hi-Res photos of Svetlana Spajić: [kitka.org/press/photos-guests.html](http://kitka.org/press/photos-guests.html)

Listen to selections from Kitka's CD catalogue: [kitka.org/music/index.html](http://kitka.org/music/index.html)

Svetlana Spajić on YouTube: [youtube.com/watch?v=nZtzAi9jFqU](http://youtube.com/watch?v=nZtzAi9jFqU)

Kitka on YouTube: [kitka.org/features/video01.html](http://kitka.org/features/video01.html)