

Kitka Long Bio 2019

Kitka is an American women's vocal arts ensemble inspired by traditional songs and vocal techniques from Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Founded in 1979 as an offshoot of the [Westwind International Folk Ensemble](#), 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 professional 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 female voices.

With an overarching mission of cultivating local and global community through song, Kitka's activities include an Oakland-based home series of concerts and vocal workshops, leadership of community choirs, regional, national, and international touring, programs in the schools, recording, publication, and broadcast projects, artist residencies, commissioning original works, community service, and adventuresome collaborations. Kitka's wide-ranging performance, teaching, and recording activities have exposed millions to the haunting beauty of the ensemble's exquisite and unusual repertoire. With deep ties to Balkan, Slavic and Caucasian lands, Kitka has performed, taught, and conducted cultural exchange activities in Poland, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Georgia, and Armenia, as well as in communities throughout the USA, Canada, and beyond.

The ensemble has produced 14 critically acclaimed recordings on the group's independent Diaphonica label (most recently, [Evening Star](#)), songbooks, soundtracks for major motion pictures and independent films, and Kitka and Davka in Concert: Old and New World Jewish Music, a PBS television special.

An important aspect of Kitka's work has also been the creation of multidisciplinary vocal theater works that tell stories of unconventional women in Eastern European folklore, myth, and history. Projects of note include [ACT's productions of Hecuba](#) with Olympia Dukakis and Viola Davis, directed by Carey Perloff with original music by David Lang; Women in Black with [AXIS Dance](#) directed by Thais Mazur with original music by Katrina Wreade; Songs from Mama's Table with [Linda Tillery and the Cultural Heritage Choir](#); Cantigas de Amigo with [Ensemble Alcatraz](#); The Rusalka Cycle: Songs between the Worlds and Singing Through Darkness, directed by [Ellen Sebastian Chang](#) and Andre Erlen with original music by [Mariana Sadovska](#); [Meredith Monk's](#) Vocal Alchemy; [Eric Banks' I will remember everything: a lyric biography of Sophia Parnok](#); and, most recently, a critically acclaimed, sold out run of [Iron Shoes](#), a contemporary folk opera created by Janet Kutulas (composer), Michelle Carter (playwright), and [Erika Chong Shuch](#) (director and choreographer), co-produced by [Shotgun Players](#).

Kitka was recently honored by a coveted Hewlett50 Arts Award, with which they will commission Slovenian composer and stage director [Karmina Šilec](#) to create BABA, a new dramatic work inspired by the lives of transgender "sworn virgins" of the Balkan highlands.

A frequently occurring symbolic word in Balkan folk songs, "Kitka" means bouquet in Bulgarian and Macedonian.