

Exquisite Harmonies from Eastern Europe

KITKA



Photo: Thomas Pacha

*“A stunning group unlike any other...
absolutely electrifying!”*

— Garrison Keillor, A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION

www.kitka.org



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Women's
Vocal
Ensemble

Exquisite Harmonies from Eastern Europe and Beyond

“Kitka’s songs are hauntingly beautiful, simple, yet otherworldly. The rich sound these women produce resonates as if energized by the universe itself, as if it were calling all live beings and still matter into togetherness and unity.”

— Ching Chang, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

Kitka is a women’s vocal ensemble unlike any other. These sophisticated singers blend a contemporary sensibility with specialized vocal techniques from Eastern Europe that have been distilled over centuries. Using only the pure unaccompanied voice, they create a constantly shifting landscape of sound, pulsing with angular rhythms, where dramatic dynamics leap from delicate stillness to shattering resonance, and seamless unisons explode into lush incomprehensible chords.

Kitka’s material ranges from ancient village duets to complex choral works, from early music to contemporary theater. The sound of their voices is exotic, both ethereal and earthy. The melodies are hauntingly beautiful. The many languages in which they sing are largely unfamiliar to American ears — Albanian, Armenian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian, Georgian, Hungarian, Ladino, Latvian, Macedonian, Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, with the occasional Corsican, medieval Gallician, or ancient Greek. It is exactly this unfamiliarity that is so riveting, as Kitka’s sensitive precision lifts their work out of the merely musical into a universe beyond words, an experience that is primal, elemental.

More than just a concert, an evening with Kitka unites vibrant music, enhanced by a subtly changing stage picture, compelling song introductions, and each singer’s warm rapport with the audience.

This is powerful music by accomplished musicians who offer more than just exquisite execution—these women clearly share a passion for what they do. Kitka: powerful female voices uniquely blended in exquisite dissonance and harmony.

“A stunning group unlike any other...absolutely electrifying!”

— Garrison Keillor,
A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION

“An earbending experience... Kitka’s sonority evokes a world of rugged beauty.”

— Allan Ulrich,
SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER



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MISSION AND HISTORY

Kitka began in 1979 as a grassroots group of singers from diverse backgrounds who shared a passion for the stunning dissonances, asymmetric rhythms, intricate ornamentation, lush harmonies, and resonant strength of Eastern European women's vocal music. Kitka has deep ties to Eastern Europe and has traveled there to perform and collect repertoire many times. Kitka has sung in prestigious venues and festivals and has conducted research in rural villages in Bulgaria, Ukraine, Macedonia, Poland, Georgia, and Armenia, as well as in ethnic communities across America. Kitka also hosts several East European folk song masters as artists-in-residence in Oakland, CA each season.

In 2000, Kitka launched the *New Folksongs Commissioning Project*, which engages some of the most exciting voices in contemporary music to create works that utilize Kitka's wide-ranging sound palette. To date, Kitka has premiered more than 35 new works by established and emerging composers including Pauline Oliveros, Chen Yi, Dan Cantrell, Marcel Khalife, David Lang, Linda Tillery, Raif Hyseni, Thilo Reinhardt, Janika Vandervelde, Mariana Sadovska, Richard Einhorn, and Meredith Monk.

Kitka's unique sound and innovative sense of programming has led to dozens of other collaborations, ranging from a reconstruction of the medieval "Carmina Burana" for CalPerformances, to work with Hollywood composers on film soundtracks. Other collaborations of note include creating the role of the Greek Chorus in ACT's *Hecuba*; the creation of *Women in Black*, a multi-disciplinary work with AXIS Dance Company; *Songs from Mama's Table*, with Linda Tillery and the Cultural Heritage Choir, and the vocal-theater work *The Rusalka Cycle: Songs Between the Worlds* (music by Mariana Sadovska, stage direction by Ellen Sebastian Chang).

Kitka has released 11 acclaimed CD recordings, most recently *Cradle Songs*. The film *Kitka and Davka in Concert: Old and New World Jewish Music* has been broadcast on more than 100 PBS stations and has been an award-winning selection at film festivals from Beijing to Toronto.

For a complete ensemble biography, visit www.kitka.org/about



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CRITICAL RESPONSE

"Simply amazing harmonies ... truly this is the most wonderful singing I have ever heard."

— David Crosby, CROSBY, STILLS, AND NASH

"Kitka's music accompanies my life."

— Meredith Monk, MacArthur Genius Award-winning composer and performer

"Only a Slavic folk tune can express bliss in a minor key, agony in jaunty dance rhythms. Kitka delivered with a combination of exquisite technique and pure, unflinching emotion. If life must hurt, it should always feel this good."

— Grant Menzies, THE OREGONIAN

"The singing of Kitka was tangy, excellently in tune and verbally communicative."

— Andrew Porter, THE NEW YORKER

"Even God stops to listen when Kitka — unamplified, without sets, props, instruments, or even lyrics most people can understand — opens its collective mouth. The sound is so chillingly beautiful, by anyone's standards, that the entire audience sits enraptured, most of them with eyes shut. My own eyes flooded with tears."

— Summer Burkes, THE GUARDIAN

"At times, it is as beautiful as a single breath of wind that gently skitters across the surface of the water at dawn. At other moments it is as unsettling as the crackling whoosh of a wildfire as it spreads through a field of dry timber ... The depth and range of the singers' skills are indisputable, and the breadth of moods and emotions covered by the ensemble is awe-inspiring ... immensely compelling."

— Douglas Heselgrave, THE MUSIC BOX

"Kitka's music can make you weak in the knees, with its haunting balance of beauty and brashness. ... breathtaking, intense and gorgeous."

— THE TRENTON TIMES

"The angular, jarring harmonies cast a hypnotic spell."

— David Lührssen, SHEPHERD EXPRESS

"Their power and energy is exotic and exhilarating ... showcasing the beauty and vitality of female voices."

— Heidi Zemach, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO

"Angelic voices in complete unison...like Mother Earth herself had opened up her vocal cords."

— Larry Luther, LEDGER DISPATCH

"[Kitka's] music's power is in the lusty, full voiced singing and glottal gymnastics, which are capable of taking the top of your head right off."

— Bill Tilland, OPTION

"... haunting and evocative vocal work ..."

— John Schaeffer, WNYC NEW SOUNDS

"The traditional and arranged songs became intoxicating through the vocal mastery and uncanny interpretive ability of Kitka."

— Rajna Klaser, S.F. CLASSICAL VOICE

"Kitka shares the same haunting repertoire as Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares—plus Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian, Russian, and Ukrainian folk material—but Kitka's sonority is much more supple and lyrical than its Bulgarian counterpart."

— Rick Reger, THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

"Arresting, well-modulated singing as if from another planet, giving its audience anything from goosebumps to chills down the spine..."

— Paul Hertelendy, ARTS SF.COM

"... An overwhelming performance full of mystery, magic, and an undeniable spiritual force. The women of Kitka sing, scream, whoop, wail, howl, and harmonize, imbuing the music with an almost primal power. ... The harmonies intertwine, shattering the divisions of space, time, and spirit, spinning a emotional spell that will haunt you long after the last note fades into the breath of the infinite."

— J. Poet, EAST BAY EXPRESS

"Their hard-tinted voices, the crystal glints and strange piercing edges, this was female singing that was beautiful without being smooth, all of this sounded new and surprising ..."

— Deanne Sole, POPMATTERS.COM



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CRITICAL RESPONSE, continued

"The haunting harmonies are both evocative and unforgettable."

— Steve Hochman and Andrew Gilbert,
THE CALIFORNIA REPORT (NPR)

"A brilliant musical program ... all of it performed with accuracy and flair."

— Don Heckman, LOS ANGELES TIMES

"Exquisitely harmonized and rhythmically charged songs that translated into laments about the ravages of war as well as celebrations of community. Kitka executed the Balkan microtonal harmonies and dissonance and the diaphonic drone melody juxtapositions with breathtaking precision... An inspirational concert that served as a reminder that it is never too late to connect with tradition."

— Derk Richardson, BILLBOARD

"For several magical moments, their rich, resonant harmonies seemed to linger in the darkness, throbbing like long-lined notes of a violin... the kind of production that audience members hold tight as if it were cut from the cloth of time."

— George Rawlinson, ELGIN COURIER NEWS

"Despite being unable to understand a word the women sang, I was stirred to the depths of my soul and more than once moved to tears."

— Bruce Amsbary, SEATTLE GAY NEWS

"One of the most unusual, delightful and technically proficient vocal ensembles ... a Kitka concert serves as a wonderful mixed bouquet ... There's variety in rhythm and intonation, from the nasality and glottal stops of the mountainous Rhodope region ... to the plaintive, heavenly harmonies of Macedonia."

— Jeff Kaliss, OAKLAND TRIBUNE

"Kitka trafficked in ghostly harmonies and delicious discord. The eight vocalists sang dissonant and diaphanous love songs, laments, and lullabies. The voices soared."

— Sam Hurwitt, THE PACIFIC SUN

"Gusty Kitka sings to the heart."

— Wayne Bledsoe, THE KNOXVILLE SENTINEL

"Exquisite voices singing in harmony with vivid emotion in an exotic, but strangely familiar, language ... [Kitka] reaches a sublimity that is hard to match."

— Mac McDonald, THE MONTEREY HERALD

"Quick screams alternating with bang-on harmony, pure bell tones and powerful perfect, perfect fifths ... singing like the very fertility of the earth—the singing went on in quartertone shaking and deep, dark passion ... a radiant ensemble ... the evening was transcendent."

— Mark Alburger, 20th CENTURY MUSIC

"A surprisingly varied concert celebrating women's lives and women's voices. A veritable feast for the ears, the eyes, and the mind."

— John Lambert, NORTH CAROLINA SPECTATOR

"The sound is haunting and immensely powerful—deep penetrating female voices centered on a single melody line or a wordless drone. The Eastern European choral music [sung by Kitka] has a power to move listeners like few other styles."

— Dave Becker, CUE

"The shimmering and pungent sounds of Kitka are cloth-of-gold thread in the sumptuous musical tapestry."

— Timothy Pfaff, SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER

"The printed word cannot describe the shouts, the cries, the mouth music, the sliding of the voice to reach an opening note, the complex rhythms, and harmonies that Kitka achieved. A writer can describe what the music, brought to a spellbound audience at the Varsity Theater evoked: women working together, celebrating together, supporting each other in song."

— Marilyn Mantay, THE DAVIS ENTERPRISE

"When Kitka starts to sing, they transport you far away, to a place where wind sweeps through deep evergreen forests and stars spill out of the sky. ... They ran through 22 folk tunes with rapt, almost introspective attention to the demands of fast trills, fluid glissandos, perfect unisons and soft subtle shadings mesmerizing in their loveliness."

— Rocky Leplin, HILLS PUBLICATIONS



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TOURING PROGRAMS

In addition to Kitka's acclaimed repertory touring concert of exquisite traditional and contemporary songs from Eastern Europe and beyond, special programs include:

Wintersongs

Kitka's popular winter holiday program showcasing seasonal music from a wide variety of Eastern European ethnic and spiritual traditions.

"A refreshing spin on traditional seasonal choral music ... A thoroughly marvelous concert!"

— Steve Zakar, producer, National Public Radio's PERFORMANCE TODAY

Sanctuary

A Kitka cathedral concert with special guest soloist Tzvetanka Varimezova. An uninterrupted, choreographed flow of sublime vocal music in resonant space.

"Kitka's tone is pure, and tuning is impeccable. Its ensemble and phrasing is highly evolved. There is strange wonder in the stunning arrangements of richly asymmetrical folk music Kitka performed."

— Rick Walters, EXPRESS MILWAUKEE

The Rusalka Cycle: Songs Between the Worlds

Kitka's cutting-edge futuristic folk opera featuring music by Mariana Sadovska and stage direction by Ellen Sebastian Chang and Andre Erlen. *The Rusalka Cycle* has been presented at the Giving Voice Festival in Wroclaw, Poland; the Globalize Festival in Köln, Germany; the Stimmen Festival in Lorrach, Germany; the Revolutions International Theater Festival in Albuquerque, NM; and the Mohylanka Theater Academy in Kiev, Ukraine.

"The Rusalka Cycle may be the most forceful piece of music the ensemble has ever been associated with."

— J. Poet, EAST BAY EXPRESS



Kitka in *The Rusalka Cycle*

Cradle Songs

A tender, playful, and sometimes haunting program exploring traditional lullabies and songs of childhood.

"The combination of lulling melodies and stark, often startling harmonies creates an exquisitely pleasurable frisson."

— Andrew Gilbert, LOS ANGELES TIMES

Orchestral Program: The Origin

Grammy winning composer Richard Einhorn's stunning new oratorio, with film by Bill Morrison, inspired by the life and discoveries of Charles Darwin.

"[Kitka] presented Darwin's jocular intelligence with absolute integrity and conviction."

— Daniel J. Kushner, THE POST-STANDARD



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RESIDENCY ACTIVITIES

Vocal Ensemble Workshops/Masterclasses (1-3 hours)

Kitka collaborates with choral directors and ensembles to incorporate songs from Eastern European folk traditions into the participating ensemble's performance repertoire. Using specialized warm-up techniques, Kitka singers introduce "open voice" singing techniques, offer pronunciation and stylistic guidance, and share cultural and historical background information on each song. These fun and intensive workshops pass along a rich repertoire of beautiful, powerful, and fun-to-sing pieces that are sure to become favorites of singers and audiences alike.

Open Your Voice: An Introduction to Balkan and Slavic Folk Singing (1-3 hours)

An engaging introduction to the powerfully resonant "village style" songs of Bulgaria, Croatia, Ukraine, Russia, Serbia, Georgia, and surrounding regions. Participants will explore the mechanics of "open voice" singing and ornamentation while learning to produce the sweet and strident sounds and compelling harmonies and dissonances that make Kitka's repertoire unique.

Young People's Programs (45 minutes to 1 hour)

Kitka offers a lively, participatory school assembly program for K-12 students exploring the Eastern European "open voice" and the lush harmonies, intricate ornamentation, odd-metered rhythms, and resonant strength of traditional Balkan and Slavic women's a cappella music. Through love songs, laments, work songs and play songs, historical songs, lullabies, healing songs, and songs in praise of nature, Kitka's singers share colorful stories that vividly portray Eastern European village life.

Lecture/Demonstration (1 hour)

An informal musical and cultural overview of the evolution of Balkan and Slavic women's ensemble singing. Topics include uses of music in ritual and everyday life, variations in national styles, and culturally specific rhythmic and harmonic structures. Kitka singers will demonstrate various "open voice" vocal techniques through a stirring selection of songs drawn from their current performance repertoire.

Open Rehearsal (1-2 hours)

A behind-the-scenes look at how Kitka prepares material for performance.

Balkan Dance/Song Workshop (1 hour)

An opportunity to learn odd-metered Balkan rhythms and melodies through traditional folk dances.

Kitka Community Sing (2 hours)

Singers of all ages and levels of experience are invited to join voices with Kitka in a celebratory circle of song. Kitka will lead the group in fun "open voice" warm-ups and will teach accessible, interesting, and beautiful tunes from their repertoire.



Kitka choral master class students:
The San Francisco Girls Chorus
Photo by RJ Muna



KITKA

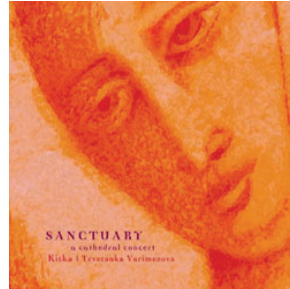
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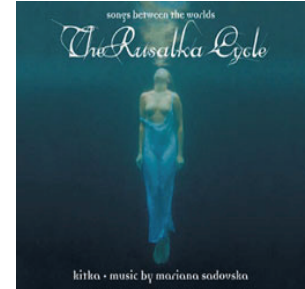
RECORDINGS



Cradle Songs
Diaphonica CD 2009



*Sanctuary:
A Cathedral Concert*
Diaphonica CD 20081



*The Rusalka Cycle:
Songs Between the Worlds*
Diaphonica CD 20071



Wintersongs
Diaphonica CD 2004



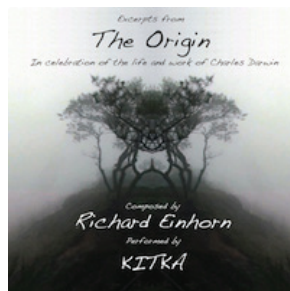
The Vine
Diaphonica CD 2002



Nectar
Diaphonica CD 098



Voices on the Eastern Wind
Diaphonica CD 092



The Origin
© Richard Einhorn, 2008



Cantigas de Amigo
with Ensemble Alcatraz
Dorian, DOR-90285



*Kitka & Davka In Concert:
Old and New World
Jewish Music (DVD)*
© Forest Creatures Entertainment, 2006

These and other Kitka recordings and merchandise can be purchased through www.kitka.org/store or by calling 510-444-0323.