

EDUCATOR GUIDE

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Discipline: Music

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Kitka members during a performance.
Still image from SPARK story, 2009.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

SUBJECT

Kitka Women's Vocal Ensemble

GRADE RANGES

K-12 and Post-Secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Music

OBJECTIVE

To illuminate the process by which a folk music ensemble researches, incorporates, and develops new material for performances during its concert season and recording projects.

STORY SYNOPSIS

Bay Area music ensemble Kitka has been exposing audiences to Eastern European a cappella music for over thirty years. Each year they host workshops and collaborations with different artists to explore both traditional and contemporary songs, compositions, and theatrical renditions of the stories expressed through women's vocal music from all over Eastern Europe. In this Spark episode, viewers get a glimpse into the world of Kitka, and their plans for developing new material and projects throughout their 2009 season. Go behind the scenes to see how this remarkable group researches and creates new works, and collaborates with traditional artists to learn, preserve and celebrate their unique and disappearing traditions.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Hands-on group projects, in which students assist and support one another

Hands-on individual projects, in which students work independently

Group oral discussion and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing

Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To foster an appreciation and understanding of Eastern European vocal music and its history.

To examine the various roles of folk music and how it is transmitted in contemporary culture.

To expose students to the concept of oral traditions.

To understand how a professional music ensemble selects and develops new repertoire.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story on Kitka on DVD or VHS and related equipment.

Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card.

CD player and musical samples selected from the **Resource** section of this guide.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers

Access to recordings of Eastern European music and CD player

Pencils, pens, and paper

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Linguistic – the ability to express oneself metaphorically and poetically

Logical-Mathematical – the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively and think logically

Musical Intelligence – the capability to recognize and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms

Interpersonal – awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Intrapersonal – awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Bodily-Kinesthetic – the ability to use one's mind to control one's bodily movements



See more information on [Multiple Intelligences](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education) at www.kqed.org/spark/education.

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

STORY SYNOPSIS

Bay Area vocal group Kitka began their journey in 1979 as a gathering of amateur singers fascinated with the exploration of traditional Eastern European women's vocal music. Under the direction of Bon Singer from 1981 to 1996 and now led by executive director Shira Cion and music director Janet Kutulas, Kitka has developed into a professional touring company dedicated to performing, recording and presenting collaborative and educational opportunities related to Balkan, Slavic and Caucasian music for audiences across the globe. Celebrating their 30th year in 2009, Kitka continues to grow artistically with challenging new projects, tours and collaborations.

The process by which the company acquires new repertoire is rooted in careful study. The eight-member group works with renowned masters from all over Eastern Europe and travels to various countries to conduct fieldwork and make critical personal connections with women in small villages, many of whom are the last to sing the songs of their ancestors. Over the years, members of Kitka were inspired by the legends of the Rusalki, siren-like mythical creatures thought to be the spirits of women who suffered tragic or untimely deaths. Working with Ukrainian singer and composer Mariana Sadovska, they returned to Ukraine to learn songs and rituals surrounding the Rusalki directly from the women in rural communities, and they created a vocal-theater piece based on their research. **The Rusalka Cycle** opened to resounding success in 2005 and again in 2008, and it is being remounted to tour Eastern Europe in 2009.

Each year brings new projects and a new concert season, and to celebrate their 30th anniversary, Kitka released their recording **Lullabies and Songs of Childhood**. This collection of reinterpreted traditional lullabies has been passed on in the oral

tradition by generations of Balkan, Slavic, Georgian and Armenian women. For their project **Singing Through the Darkness: A Dramatic Song-Cycle**

Performance, they gathered songs and stories that express the multifaceted experience of wartime, with a special effort to invite contributions from the survivors of the Balkan conflict living in the Bay Area.

As part of their ongoing commitment to preserving endangered vocal traditions and collaborations with traditional artists, Kitka developed a program called **Song Routes in a New Land: Folk Song Master Residencies**, in which they work with several master folk singers and teachers dedicated to transmitting their vocal heritage both at home and within immigrant communities in the United States. Artists for 2009 include Birol Topaloglu (Laz vocalist from Turkey), Tzvetanka Varimezova (Bulgaria), Ensemble Kedry (Siberia) and Hasmik Harutyunyan (Armenia).

BIG PICTURE

The history of Eastern European women's vocal music extends far back in history, hundreds, if not thousands of years, and represents a complex merging of many cultural and historical influences. Inspirations include the Slavic, Greek, Roman (Byzantine) and Turkish Empires as well as the more recent European monarchies, communist governments and the current democratic and capitalist environments. Subsequently, folk music has fulfilled many roles, from the utilitarian to the artistic, and has been informed by all of its history, marking important life cycles and reflecting stories of conquest and oppression, love and loss, and struggles for identity.

Both men and women are active participants in Eastern European folk music traditions, maintaining their distinctive repertoire of songs. Until the 1600's, most people in Europe were peasants, and most music revolved around agrarian and religious cycles. As many men were off hunting or tending to the flocks in the forests and fields, or battling with enemies, women often were left to grow the crops,

raise the children and subsequently developed a range and capacity for passing on oral histories of their villages and families. Over the course of time, they presided over many of the seasonal and fertility rituals that were an important part of religious traditions, representing a merging of pre-Christian, Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths coinciding with the historical currents of their geographic and historic locations.

With the rise of larger cities and industrialization, populations shifted toward urban environments, many traditional songs lost their original context. As part of that ongoing evolution, politics took its place among the many functions of music. The rise of nationalism and communism marked an especially interesting period in Eastern European musical history. In Russia in the 1930's, Stalin seized the opportunity to take the folk music of the people and convert it into music of the proletariat, and mandated the codification of selected folk music styles, superimposing nationalist lyrics to support communist ideology.

Through this process, many songs and traditions were categorically omitted, (especially those of the Romany) but many others were preserved, while traditional singers were taken from their villages, and given conservatory training to learn Western classical performance practices and techniques. Some went on to enjoy professional careers as performers on television and radio, broadcasting the celebration of traditional folk music while imparting the nationalist agenda. Although this process served to save many songs and kept many aspects in tact (such as the meters, modes and song structures), it imposed Western musical stylistics on the folk music, "cleaning" or standardizing the intervals and adding more polyphonic harmonies on a grander choral scale. Choreography was added with dancers wearing stylized versions of traditional clothing, and performances were set for stage with a greater variety of tempos, meters, styles and shorter duration than one might find in its original context. But this new framework also gave rise to greater virtuosity among musicians, the development of hundreds of professional folk ensembles, and during the communist era provided an opportunity for travel, performance and income via music that had never before been possible.

Although many of the oral traditions that used to be vital parts of an agrarian society centered on the harvest, fertility rites and life cycles have now become relegated to the performance stage. This is not to say that oral traditions do not exist. Across Eastern Europe songs are still sung by women to accompany births, deaths, weddings, physical labor and just for fun, yet as modernity comes to call, some of these women are the last in a great lineage to sing these songs.

In the case of Bulgaria, industrialization didn't fully arise until World War II, and there are handfuls of people who remember the songs and traditions of their childhood before the war. It is such women with whom folklorists race to connect, to learn the songs in their traditional contexts and without the parameters of Western performance practices.

Living oral tradition is further evidenced in certain celebrations such as Rusalki Week in the Ukraine. Legend has it that for one week every April, the spirits of women who have died under tragic circumstances known as the Rusalki walk the earth, luring men and women to unfavorable fates. Every year, Ukrainians go to the cemeteries and sing laments for their loved ones, but also sing songs of praise to appease the Rusalki's troubled souls. It's also wise to leave a spoon out for the Rusalki at the dinner table. During this time, young girls are taken door to door, dressed in leaves, for something called "kust" and are likewise sung to, as part of an ancient fertility rite of passage. Then, at the end of the week, the Rusalki are "sung" back to their netherworld for another year.

Today, the political and economic climate has changed again, and with the fall of many communist regimes has come the dearth of funding for many festivals and state-run ensembles. Introduction of amplified music and Western pop music has begun to merge with traditional styles to become the new generation of folk music.

Amidst this rapidly changing cultural climate, certain individuals have come forward as great scholars, folklorists, performers and teachers of the traditions, who have not forgotten their countries' histories, but are able to place themselves within the larger context of their own folk traditions.

Such is the case with Tzvetanka Varimezova - originally from Bulgaria and now a visiting artist at UCLA's ethnomusicology dept. As teacher, performer and recording artist, Tzvetanka navigates the merging of traditional and contemporary cultures, gracefully exploring the new without discarding the old, and with a fierce dedication to preserving her cultural traditions. She and others like her work tirelessly to teach the traditional songs to professional groups like Kitka, students, and to immigrant populations in the US. Achieving great success, they are enjoying great popularity and a solid audience base that continues to grow, not only in the US, but also back in Eastern Europe.

Just as it has done for time immemorial, traditional music will continue if it finds relevance to new audiences, be it economic, aesthetic, sacred or political, and the traditional vocal music of Eastern Europe will continue to adapt and develop to reflect the current needs and views of its community. With inspirational role models as the medium, this exciting vocal music will surely sing the stories of its people for generations to come.

RESOURCES - TEXTS

Slobin, Mark, editor. Retuning Culture: Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe. 1997 Duke University Press

Olson, Laura. Performing Russia: Folk Revival and Russian Identity. 2004, Routledge Courzon.

Forsyth, Martha. Listen Daughter, and Remember Well, the Songs and Life of Linka Gekova Gergova, From the Village of Bistritsa. St. Kliment Ohridski University Press 1996

Kremenliev, Boris. Bulgarian-Macedonian Folk Music. University of California Press, 1952.

Ling, Jan. A History of European Folk Music. University of Rochester Press, 1997.

Rice, Timothy. Music in Bulgaria: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture. Oxford Univ. Press 2004.

RESOURCES – WEB SITES

Kitka's official Web site including discography, performing schedules, workshops, and video clips, etc. <http://www.kitka.org/>

Kitka's Myspace page:

<http://www.myspace.com/kitkawomensvocalensemble>

Mariana Sadovska's website

http://www.borderlandmusic.de/inhalte/en/borderland-band_en.html

UCLA ethnomusicology site, with information on Tzvetanka Varimezova.

<http://www.ethnomusic.ucla.edu/people/varimezt.htm>

Inside World Music – a site on Russian music

<http://www.insideworldmusic.com/cs/russia.html>

RESOURCES – VIDEO

YouTube now has a number of video samplings of women's vocal choirs, including those of Kitka and the Bulgarian Women's Choir. Search under Kitka or Tzvetanka Varimezova at www.YouTube.com

RECORDINGS

See Kitka's Web site for a complete listing of all their albums– they have about 10 albums available plus a Wintersongs Songbook. Here are a few:

Wintersongs

Nectar

The Rusalka Cycle: Songs Between the Worlds, 2005

The Vine

Sanctuary, A Cathedral Concert

Sadovska, Mariana. Borderland, Mariana Sadovska

Stancheva, Kremena. One Voice from "The Mystery"

Brody, Lauren. 1998. Song of the crooked Dance: Early Bulgarian Traditional Music, 1927-42. Yazoo Records 7016

Bulgarian Women's Choir :

Live Tour '93 – Melody, Rhythm and Harmony
Rhino/WEA

Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares, 4AD. 1986
Cathedral Concert (Live), Polygram (re-released in 1992)

Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares, volume II, 4AD. 1988
Box Set: Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares, volumes 1 - II
Nonesuch 1995

Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares, volume IV, Phillips
1998

Bulgarian Custom Songs, Gega 2001

The Bulgarian Women's Choir is also featured on a new compilation album with the Tuvan throat singers entitled Vocal Music From One Earth – Vol. 1- Eastern Europe and Southern Siberia. Globe Music Media, 2009

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

Ashkenaz Community and Dance Center, 1317 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley – for live concerts and dance bands, including popular Balkan dance traditions.
www.ashkenaz.com/

The East European Folklife Center
510.547.1118
www.eefc.org
Offering Balkan music camps in Northern California for the whole family.

The Jazz School for Music Study and Performance
2087 Addison Street Berkeley, CA 94704
510.845.5373
e-mail: swing@jazzschool.com
Classes offered with Janet Kutulas of Kitka in East European vocal technique.

Down Home Music Store
10341 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito
A great local place to look for folk music of all kinds.
www.downhomemusic.com

SECTION III – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

A Cappella

Music sung without an instrumental accompaniment

Accompany

To play a vocal or instrumental part that supports or complements a solo part played by another musician.

Chest Voice

The lower ranges of the singing voice, often a stronger or louder sound.

Consonance

In music, consonance can refer to a chord, harmony, or interval that is stable, or culturally defined as “pleasing” to the ear. It usually denotes a lack of harmonic tension and a greater coincidence of overtones between the intervals.

Dissonance

A sound that is culturally defined as discordant, in Western music terminology, when there is emphasis on the 2nd, 7th or 9th scale degrees, creating harmonic tension that subsequently needs a “consonant” resolution.

Drone

A continuous note that does not change throughout the course of a piece of music or a segment of music.

Gaida

A Bulgarian bagpipe, made of goat’s skin.

Head Voice

The higher ranges of the voice; also describes how the vocal chords are used in a way that directs more sound into the resonances of the head, including nasal cavities, creating often a lighter, less forceful sound.

Homophony

A musical texture or singing in which all the voices or parts move in the same or similar rhythm.

Instrumentation

A term used to identify what instruments will be played in a given ensemble or piece of music.

Interval

The distance between two pitches

Meter

The organization of beats or pulsation, most often in duple or triple groupings

Polyphony

A musical texture or singing style with two or more melodic parts sounded together.

Rusalka

The mythological spirit of young women who have died too young or of unfortunate circumstances, believed to roam the land and waters, luring living people to their deaths.

Technique

The command of fundamental skills needed to perform on any instrument and with an ensemble.

Vibrato

The quavering or movement of the voice while singing to create a slight variation of pitch either above or below the main tone, in varying tempos.

SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

For K-3 – Exploring basic vocal techniques

For very young children, try some fun games to engage them in using their singing verses speaking voices. Begin by playing an echo game. Using your speaking voice say, “this is my speaking voice”, and have them echo you. Then whisper, “This is my whispering voice” – they echo. Next say “This is my calling voice!”, and lastly sing “This is my singing voice” on “sol-mi-mi-sol-sol-mi”. Once they have established the differences between singing and speaking, play a game of “Farmer, farmer”. You’ll need a clear space in which to move, or even take it outside if possible. In this game, the teacher begins as the farmer, and all the students are on one side of the classroom. The students must sing to the farmer, “Farmer, farmer, may we cross you river”, on the notes “sol-mi, sol-mi, sol sol mi la sol mi”. If the farmer says “Yes, you may” in a speaking voice, the students may cross to the other side of the room walking. However, if the farmer sings “Yes, you may” (sol-mi-do), he/she tries to tag a child as they run across the room to the other side. Whoever is tagged, becomes the farmer next, and the game continues until all the children have had a turn being the farmer.

Odd meters

The rhythmic complexity of Eastern European music is difficult for many Westerners to grasp at first, but with practice, it becomes more accessible. Although many meters exist, including duple and 4/4 meters, it is common to hear 5/8 or 7/8 or 11/8, often broken up into little combinations of 2 beats and 3 beats, i.e., a 5/8 meter which contains 5 eighth notes of equal value, could be expressed as 12-123, with an emphasis on each “1”. Likewise a 7/8-meter might sound like 12-12-123, or 123-12-12. Conduct a little drumming and dancing exercise, in which half the class plays a heavy beat on every “1” in this pattern: 12-12-123. The other half of the group could be lightly tapping out just the eighth note pulses 1234567- 1234567. When the rhythm feels somewhat

stable, switch groups. Eventually take it to the dance floor, where half the class continues drumming, and the other half tries dancing, to the short, short, long of the downbeats.

RELATED STANDARDS

Music Grade 2

1.3 Identify ascending/descending melody and even/uneven rhythm patterns in selected pieces of music.

Music Grade 7

3.1 Compare music from various cultures as to some of the functions music serves and the roles of musicians.

3.3 Identify and describe distinguishing

How do they do it?

The vocal techniques for singing in the Eastern European style are unique and specific to the genre. There is emphasis on using one’s “chest voice”, specific “vibrato”, and little “yelps” and techniques that are used as ornamentation and as a means for expression. Examine these styles by contrasting them with Western opera and something like the Tuvan throat singers or Indian vocal styles. Discuss the use of “dissonant” chords as well as “drones” and how they create tension and subsequent release. Pose questions such as why would these vocal styles be important? Include in the discussion location, occupation of singers and the specific function of the music.

As a science extension, examine the use of resonators (there are simple activities found online) and how they work to amplify a sound.

As a writing extension, have students research the nature of different cultural traditions and their origins. For instance, work songs that were sung outside had to develop a vocal style that enabled singers to be heard from farther away. Rhythms could help coordinate work efforts. Interlocking

patterns ensure that people work together and can hear each other in addition to making work more pleasurable. Invite students to present their findings to the class along with samples if possible.

How does it make you feel?

Conduct an experiment using drones and overtones, and then discuss how it makes the students feel. Begin with a simple song like Mary Had a Little Lamb, but have one group of students sing the song on a single note “do”. The second group sings the song in the same key, but just sings the song regularly. Then, have them pause and hold the notes on certain underlined words, like “Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb” to really feel how they sound against the drone tone. Discuss how it is culturally defined what we consider to be dissonant and consonant.

Next, working with partners, have each pair begin singing only a single same pitch. They should be standing facing each other fairly close together to hear the partials and overtones change. Then, while one person maintains that pitch, the other can slowly move their singing pitch up or down until they hear the changes in not only the notes, but in the overtones present. This is often experienced as a series of “beats” or sounds as if the note is pulsating slightly faster or slower. Or you might experience it as an increase in intensity as the pitches change. Then as they come back together or arrive at a larger interval like a major 3rd, the beats should slow down and smooth out a bit. This is often how musicians know they are in or out of tune with one another when playing Western music. However, the tension or ringing quality created by close intervals might be desirable in other musical cultures. Discuss with the students their reactions and observations.

Oral traditions:

Storytelling through traditional songs

Investigate oral traditions and folk songs from Eastern Europe and the United States and Mexico. Watch the Spark episode on Kitka and discuss the many roles music has traditionally held for Eastern Europeans. As Tzventaknka says, “these songs are all about daily life, often about war or love.” But

many more were work songs or songs for important cultural events. Lead a discussion on why oral traditions are important and how they are transmitted. Are there oral traditions in the United States and Mexico? (Consider the Brer Rabbit tales from the American South, or La Llorona from Mexico) Break up the class into groups and have students work together to conduct their research. Allow each group to give oral presentations on a country like Bulgaria or the Ukraine, or the US, and present their findings, including musical examples and pictures.

Sparklers!

Topics for further discussion and exploration:

- **Listening and geography quiz** – After studying distinct vocal traditions, finish the unit by having a listening competition. Present students with unique examples of vocal music from different countries and have them identify from where they come by placing markers on a world map. Be sure to have them identify the country of origin, the name of the singing style or population, and the language spoken.
- **The collaborative process**
Theater is by nature a collaborative process. Examine other collaborations that have taken their librettos from novels or myths and legends. See also the Spark episode on the Bonsetter’s Daughter opera.
- **Make your own folk instruments** – most, if not all truly folk instruments had humble beginnings, from simple flutes made out of bamboo, bone, or reeds, to the more complex instruments like the Bulgarian gajda – a type of bagpipe made out of goat skin. But simple leaves or blades of grass held between two thumbs can also produce an amazing sound (there’s even a Japanese musician who makes instruments out of vegetables, see his YouTube channel here: <http://www.youtube.com/user/heita3>). Have your class come up with creative ideas for folk instruments made out of natural or found objects, and create a band.

RELATED STANDARDS

Music

Grades 8-12 - Artistic Perception

1.5 Analyze and compare the use of musical elements representing various genres, styles, and cultures, with an emphasis on chords and harmonic progressions.

Historical and Cultural Context

3.5 Classify, by genre or style and historical period or culture, unfamiliar but representative aural example of music and explain the reasoning for the classification

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>.