

Kitka Comes to NCSU Center Stage

By Jaye Kreller

Amazingly enough, as conditions, circumstances, and abilities change throughout history and across cultural boundaries, the basic package of human emotions remains a relative constant. Stress, sorrow, hope, and joy are no different today than centuries ago, and no different in Russia than here, although the causes of the emotions may bear little resemblance. It is for this very reason that a small chorus of women's voices singing traditional folk songs of other cultures and other generations consistently leaves audiences speechless and at times in tears.

The Oakland-based ensemble Kitka brings together women of various backgrounds with a shared passion for the music of these cultures and a heartfelt enthusiasm for the timeless stories they tell. Folk songs and choral works from Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Hungary and Bulgaria are brought forth and often explained to audiences, enhancing understanding and appreciation, both of the cultures and the music.

Recently I talked with Bon Brown, the director of Kitka and an out lesbian, to gain some insight into the group and their music, and why it seems to have such profound effects on concert-goers. It seems that learning about Kitka was something of a cultural education in itself and I thought that folks contemplating attending their upcoming concert might also be interested in the discoveries.

JK: Are you or other chorus members full-time performers?

BB: No. Actually all of the members except myself are employed full-time outside of the chorus. Acting as director serves as a part-time job for me, but I also maintain a second part-time job.

We're all very excited about a new soloist who will be joining the ensemble next season. Her name is Tatiana Sabinska. She's currently teaching

at the Boston Conservatory and is a veteran of the State Ensemble in Bulgaria where she was a featured soloist. Now, not all of our members have this type of background and most make livings outside of music, but it is a very exciting time for us.

We're also working on a role in the upcoming show *Hecuba* starring Olympia Dukakis, with music by David Lange—so we do seem to be putting more and more time into performing. We also do about 25-30 concerts annually.

JK: Describe what you see as the "mission" of Kitka. Or is there a mission at all?

BB: People want to herd us into a folk-artist category. My goal is to move the audience, not educate them. I want to give them an experience, not just entertainment, maybe bring them closer to themselves or the person they came with.

Sure, we do give a certain amount of information during the concert but it's also more than aesthetic. Singing in nine different languages, of course the music is the focus, but we do provide translations and meanings of the songs.

My favorite compliment after a show was when



someone came up to me and said, "Bon, I...uh, um...whew!" Then I knew we had the right impact.

JK: What subject matter are most often dealt with within the songs?

BB: Some songs are so abstract they really don't translate well, many songs are playful love songs, some are traditional ballads about war heroes. Sadness comes up, in one song in particular. A bride is being married off into a family and is moving away to be with a groom she's never

met, so it's a sad song surrounding what we customarily view as a happy occasion. Many of the songs are full of symbolism, but the topics are quite varied.

JK: Where was the research done on the songs and their meanings?

BB: Various methods were used, actually. If songs aren't clear, we use contacts, sources, usually natives of the countries the songs are from. Individuals come in from time to time and translate for us and give us the cultural background.

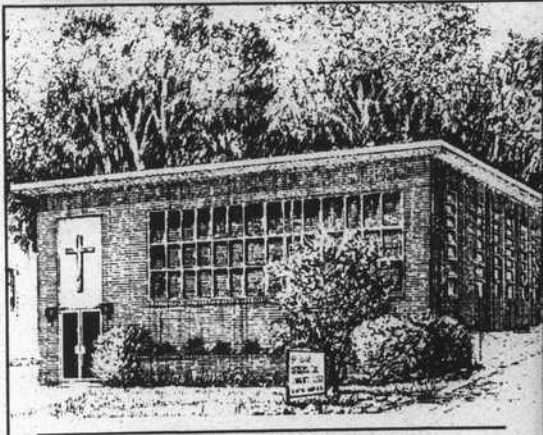
JK: What message, meaning or feeling does Kitka try to impart to listeners?

BB: We try to promote a message of tolerance, understanding, and peace. Having people say, "I don't understand the words, but we seem to share the same emotions like sadness or joy," or "I don't understand the words, but beauty and pain seem universal to us all." It's great when someone leaves with that message.

JK: Do you see Kitka's appeal as universal or does it lend itself more to a women's audience?

BB: Absolutely a universal appeal. I love bringing this music to audiences and watching the reactions and reception. I mean, younger, older, male, female, diverse ethnic backgrounds, all just seem to come into the music. It's beautiful material, absolutely universal in its appeal. I think the audience can see how much we love and enjoy each other, and the passion we have for the music really comes across.

Kitka will be performing as part of the North Carolina State University Center Stage series at 8 p.m., January 27, at Stewart Theater in Raleigh. General admission is \$13, reserved seating is \$17. Call (919) 515-1100 (voice/TDD) for tickets, or (919) 515-3927 for more information. Kitka's recordings Kitka and Voices on the Eastern Wind are also available through Ladyslipper Music; call (919) 683-1570.



ST. JOHN'S METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

Upcoming Events

Saturday 14JAN95, 7:00pm

Diversity Dinner

Bring a non-meat dish which reflects your ethnic/cultural background. You are also encouraged to wear clothing which reflects your heritage.

Sunday 15JAN95, 7:15pm

Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration

Rev. Irene Travis of Cathedral of Hope MCC in Dallas, TX will be the featured speaker for this year's MLK event.

W. Wayne Lindsey—Sr. Pastor
Wanda Y. Floyd—Assoc. Pastor
805 Glenwood Avenue
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SUNDAY SCHEDULE:

11:00am WORSHIP 'Joyful Morning'
Child Care Provided
2:00pm Sign language class
5:30pm PM Praise Choir Practice
7:15pm WORSHIP 'PM Praise'
Sign Language Interpreter

For more information on these and other meetings and events at St. John's MCC, call 834-2611.

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