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Media Contact: John Hill
john@johnhillpr.com
510.435.7128

KITKA ANNOUNCES THE WORLD PREMIERE OF
BABA: The Life and Death of Stana

A new opera by Karmina Šilec performed by Kitka



Barbara Byers photographed by Dorian Šilec Petek

Kitka.org

OAKLAND, CA, January 5, 2023 — Kitka Women’s Vocal Ensemble is proud to announce the world premiere of ***BABA: The Life and Death of Stana***, authored, composed and directed by **Karmina Šilec**. *BABA* is a new opera inspired by the lives of sworn virgins of the Balkan Highlands, women who live as men after taking vows of celibacy. *BABA* runs February 23 – 26, 2023 at Z Space in San Francisco. Tickets, \$25 - \$125, will go on sale January 10 at zspace.org/BABA.

For more than four decades, Kitka has shared a vast repertoire of traditional and contemporary music from Balkan, Baltic, Caucasus and Slavic lands, while also creating

adventurous original work inspired by the polyphonic vocal sonorities rooted in these parts of the world. Kitka's commitment to supporting new music has been borne out through collaborations with such distinguished composers as David Lang, Chen Yi, Eric Banks, Pauline Oliveros, Mariana Sadovska, Richard Einhorn and Meredith Monk.

For their latest project, Kitka commissioned Šilec, who is the artistic director of Carmina Slovenica, New Music Theater Choregie and Ensemble ¡Kebataola!, all world renowned for their unconventional choral storytelling, blending music, drama, movement and visuals. In the United States she may be best known for *Toxic Psalms*, which had its premiere at the 2015 Prototype Festival in Brooklyn, New York. "Vibrantly theatrical, genre-blurring, unusual in its techniques, eclectic in its musical style and politically charged," exclaimed *The New York Times*.

Šilec developed *BABA* over a number of years including fellowships and residencies at Harvard Radcliffe Institute, the Stellenbosch Institute in South Africa and The Ground Floor at Berkeley Repertory Theater. The project's final phase of development will take place at Oakland's Mills College at Northeastern University as part of their Performing Artists in Residence program.

BABA presents a multidisciplinary and non-narrative take on Balkan epic storytelling traditions, while exploring themes of gender, custom and the complexities of interpreting the category of the sworn virgin through a liberal Western gaze.

The tradition of sworn virgins is embedded in an ancient social code present in remote rural regions of Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. Born as women, life circumstances including the loss of male relatives in blood feuds or other vendettas, a lack of sons in the household, taking the place of a brother too ill to serve in the army, eldercare obligations, a desire to escape an oppressive arranged marriage, the death of a fiancée, abandonment by a husband – all lead these individuals to become men thereby gaining the honors, rights, privileges and freedoms of community patriarchs. Crucially, the self-professed motives of sworn virgins are more often than not social responsibility and family honor, as opposed to sexual preference or feelings of being male by nature.

"*BABA* brings to light a disappearing practice of women sacrificing their sexuality and transforming themselves into men as a means of survival in an isolated, impoverished and intensely patriarchal region of the world," said **Shira Cion**, executive artistic director of Kitka.

To achieve Šilec's vision, Kitka is employing an expanded ensemble of 12 performers, including guest artists **Shira Kammen** and **Beth Wilmurt**. Kammen is a multi-instrumentalist who has performed with numerous early music ensembles including Sequentia, Hesperion XX and the Boston Camerata. She has also performed on several recordings and performance projects of Kitka's over the years. Actor and singer Wilmurt is a celebrated member of the Bay Area's experimental theater scene, and *BABA* is her second collaboration with Kitka after *Iron Shoes*, which received a sold-out run at Berkeley's Shotgun Players in 2018.

In addition to Kammen and Wilmurt, the cast includes **Kelly Atkins, Caitlin Tabancay Austin, Leslie Bonnet, Briget Boyle, Barbara Byers, Shira Cion, Juliana Graffagna, Erin Lashnits Herman, Janet Kutulas** and **Maclovía Quintana**.

Additional collaborators include scenic and projection designer **Dorian Šilec Petek** and movement advisor **Sidra Bell**. Petek, who is also a director, filmmaker and fine art photographer, has shown work at The Slovenian National Drama Theatre in Ljubljana, Robert Wilson's Watermill Center in New York, the Milan Triennale and the Manchester Festival. Bell is an internationally recognized choreographer who recently became the first Black woman to be commissioned by New York City Ballet.

Rounding out the creative team are associate movement advisor **Sarah Lisette Chiesa**, lighting designer and technical director **G. Chris Griffin**, associate projection designer **Miha Likar**, associate costume designer **Vesna Novitović**, and Balkan Romani multi-instrumentalist and percussion master **Rumen "Sali" Shopov**.

As part of her residency at Mills College at Northeastern University, Šilec will give a lecture on January 20 at 7:30 p.m. She will discuss the process of devising *BABA* and her signature compositional strategies she's codified under the name *Choregie*. Attendance at this lecture is free with RSVP at [kitka.org/events/2022/12/19/lecture-karmina-ilec-the-choregie-method-and-baba-the-life-and-death-of-stana](https://www.kitka.org/events/2022/12/19/lecture-karmina-ilec-the-choregie-method-and-baba-the-life-and-death-of-stana).

The commissioning, creation, and presentation of *BABA* is supported, in part, by The Hewlett50 Arts Commissions, The National Endowment for the Arts, New Music USA, the City of Oakland Cultural Funding Program, the Zellerbach Family Foundation, Mills College Performing Arts, The Djerassi Resident Artists Program and the Berkeley Repertory Theater's Ground Floor Artist Residencies. For more information visit [Kitka.org](https://www.kitka.org).

ABOUT KARMINA ŠILEC

Karmina Šilec is the artistic director and conductor of Carmina Slovenica, New Music Theater Choregie and Ensemble ¡Kebataola!. With her artistic concept *Choregie* and a research-oriented process, she has brought freshness and originality to the world of vocal music and theater. As a conductor and director, she has had projects with numerous theater companies, opera houses and ensembles worldwide. Her interests lie in music-driven theater, music that refers or reacts to other fields, the human voice as a central fascination, and the exploration of different music and theater languages.

Šilec has received two Music Theatre NOW awards, the Robert Edler Prize for Choral Music and, together with her companies, the Golden Mask and more than 20 other international awards. Her ensembles have performed at such highly esteemed venues and festivals as the Dresdner Musikfestspiele; Festival d'Automne à Paris; Holland Festival; Hong Kong Cultural Centre; Melbourne International Arts Festival; Moscow Easter Festival; Operadagen Rotterdam; Prototype Festival; the Ruhrtriennale; St. Petersburg Philharmonia Grand Hall; Teatro Colón; Teresa Carreño Theater; and the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space. In 2017, she was nominated for the Europe Prize Theatrical Realities.

ABOUT KITKA WOMEN'S VOCAL ENSEMBLE

Inspired by traditional songs and vocal techniques from Eastern Europe and Eurasia, Kitka has earned international recognition for its distinctive sound, exploring a vast palette of ancient yet contemporary-sounding vocal effects. 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 ranging from Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares to Meredith Monk. Currently celebrating its 43rd 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.

FACT SHEET

WHAT:

Kitka Women's Vocal Ensemble presents the world premiere of ***BABA: The Life and Death of Stana***, a new opera by renowned Slovenian director, composer, author and conductor **Karmina Šilec**. *BABA* is inspired by the lives of sworn virgins of the Balkan Highlands, women who live as men after taking vows of celibacy.

WHEN:

February 23 – 26, 2023

Thursday - Saturday at **8 p.m.**

Sunday at **2 p.m.**

WHERE:

Z Space

450 Florida Street

San Francisco, CA 94110

TICKETS:

\$25 - \$125

To purchase tickets online visit zspace.org/BABA.

RELATED LECTURE:

January 20, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.

Karmina Šilec will give a lecture about the creation of *BABA*.

Where:

Holland Theater on the campus of Mills College at Northeastern University

5000 MacArthur Boulevard

Oakland, CA, 94613

Free with RSVP at kitka.org/events/2022/12/19/lecture-karmina-ilec-the-choregie-method-and-baba-the-life-and-death-of-stana

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Kitka.org

For all press inquiries please contact John Hill at johnhillpr@gmail.com.