

# San Francisco Chronicle

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## Datebook

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND SFGATE.COM | Thursday, May 12, 2011 | Section E WB



**Composer Meredith Monk has several projects in the works.**

large, what joins these artists is an exciting and unorthodox approach to singing. Over the past four decades Monk, 69, has developed a distinctive vocabulary of vocal techniques, extending from wordless crooning to hyperactive strings of syllables. And Kitka, led by Executive Director Shira Cion, has expanded its original ethnographic project to encompass a variety of new and unusual music.

Sunday's program will feature an array of Monk's music from 1976 to the present, some of it being done locally for the first time. Monk spoke recently by phone from her Manhattan home.

**Q: How did you and Kitka cross paths?**

**A:** I met Shira in the late '80s, when she was a student at Wesleyan. She kept in touch over the years, and from time to time she'd send a CD. We've been trying to get this project together for 10 years, but I've been overwhelmed with other projects.

**Q: What appealed to you about working with them?**

**A:** They already have those different vocal

## Concert collaboration

*Monk from page E1*

qualities — the shouting and the glottal stops — and when they do the Balkan music there's no tension at all. So I thought they would be open to trying my vocabularies, because when I work with a classical ensemble it's hard to get them to approach things in a different way.

**Q: How hard was it to adapt your music for Kitka?**

**A:** I actually don't have much repertoire for just treble voices. I had to go back and re-voice some of these pieces; it'll be interesting to see if this music can work for all female voices.

They're also going to premiere "Phantom Voices," a vocal version of "Phantom Strings" which I wrote for the Kronos Quartet. When I wrote that piece originally I literally laid tracks and sang each part for the quartet, so now the mu-

sic is coming full circle.

**Q: This week ECM is releasing a new CD of "Songs of Ascension," a theatrical piece that you did at Stanford in 2008. What does it take to transfer multimedia work to disc?**

**A:** Whenever I make a CD, I end up revising and rethinking the music, because now you're getting this experience through only one sense. I try to enrich the voicing and the instruments, to give people a different experience for their ears.

**Q: You and your ensemble always perform from memory, with a kind of oral tradition. But lately, in your compositions for Kronos and the St. Louis Symphony, you've been compelled to actually write your music down. Has that been hard for you?**

**A:** I can't understand how people can perform from written

music. I think you have to get this music into your bones, because you don't get what's there otherwise.

**Q: What are you working on at the moment?**

**A:** I'm finally doing a project with Björk that we've been trying to get going for about five years. She did a cover of "Gotham Lullaby" — not on an album, it was just on the Internet — and I heard it and wrote her a card. It was a really nice version, which kept the spirit of the piece but in her own way, instead of just trying to imitate me.

**Q: You sound a little frantic with all this going on.**

**A:** Honestly, I have about nine things going at once. I'm going to take a few months off in the fall, which is something I haven't had since I was 20. I never had, so to speak, a semester off. I'll still be working, but I'll be working quietly.

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## MUSIC Monk, Kitka join up

**By Joshua Kosman**  
CHRONICLE MUSIC CRITIC

It's an obvious pairing, but it's happening Sunday for the first time. Meredith Monk, the visionary composer, vocalist and choreographer, will join forces with Kitka, the women's vocal ensemble best

**Meredith Monk and Kitka:** 7 p.m. Sun. Kanbar Hall, JCCSF, 3200 California St., S.F. \$32-\$41. (415) 292-1200. [www.jccsf.org](http://www.jccsf.org).

known for its vibrant explorations of traditional Balkan music.

Though the surface disparities may loom

*Monk continues on E6*