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Shotgun Players and Kitka Women's Vocal Ensemble present the world premiere of *Iron Shoes*.

A folk opera based on Eastern European fairy tales reimagined for our times, directed by Erika Chong Shuch

Berkeley, CA – At a time when women’s stories are piercing through an ancient silence, 22 Bay Area artists join forces to give voice to female endurance and self-determination through language, harmony, muscle, movement, and dramatic design.

A contemporary folk opera, *Iron Shoes* reimagines three Eastern European fairy tales as radical stories for our times. The work combines the visions of Director and Choreographer [Erika Chong Shuch](#), Composer and Music Director [Janet Kutulas](#), and Playwright and Librettist [Michelle Carter](#), collaborating with Oakland’s powerhouse vocal ensemble Kitka and joined by eight of the Bay Area’s most compelling multidisciplinary performers and [Shotgun Players](#)’ visionary production design team. ***Iron Shoes* begins previews on Thursday, March 15; opens on Thursday, March 22; and runs through Sunday, April 15, 2018, at the Ashby Stage, 1901 Ashby Avenue, Berkeley.**

Each tale depicts an innocent heroine unjustly cursed to suffer a host of monstrous cruelties, including wandering around the earth in iron shoes. A modern female narrator tries to understand their stories and control their journeys, only to discover that it’s a real test to “walk a mile in someone else’s shoes,” especially when they’re made of iron.

Iron Shoes bursts the bubble on a much larger fantasy—that infinite choice, opportunity, freedom, and fulfillment can be accessible to all. How many are truly able to “take control of their own story?” The three co-creators of *Iron Shoes* weigh in on powers of empathy and solidarity at work in the piece.

“Core to the story,” Playwright and Librettist Michelle Carter says, “is the mighty, mind-, heart-, and soul-expanding force of empathy. The narrator in our show is telling other women’s stories, but feels nothing. She has no insight into their experience, no compassion. She feels herself entitled to weightlessly explore the universe, abandoning the lowborn, common women and their heavy, iron-shoed predicaments. The ‘unempowered’ women turn the tables on her, earning their places in the world by claiming their own stories.”

Director and Choreographer Erika Chong Shuch says, “Each character is striving towards understanding, which feels like an important act of protest, in direct response to the menacing, divisive and fascist politics of our times. Harnessing beauty as a radical change agent, we’re striving to create a work that carves out space

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for our imaginations to swell, a place where we can create intimate encounters for humans to feel each other's flaws and wrestle towards forgiveness."

Composer and Music Director Janet Kutulas says, "I think fate—and who controls it—are big issues in our world today. Often, young female figures in Eastern European fairy tales are portrayed as powerless characters unjustly tormented by stronger personalities, and sometimes the tormentors are women themselves. These archetypes are deeply embedded in our collective unconscious. Our three protagonists are—in a way—banding together for a big 'me too' statement."

***Iron Shoes* is the product of years of collaboration among an all-star ensemble of Bay Area female performing artists.** The work began a decade ago when veteran Kitka vocalist, composer, and music director Janet Kutulas found herself haunted by folk tales depicting young women challenged to embark on long journeys clad in shoes of iron. Kutulas originally created a song cycle for Kitka, but the wit and whimsy of her music and lyrics begged to be fully staged. Kitka invited Erika Chong Shuch and Michelle Carter aboard to amplify the tales with movement and language. Initial development of the theatrical version of *Iron Shoes* was supported by Berkeley Repertory Theatre's Ground Floor program, with additional residency support from the American Conservatory Theater.

More at shotgunplayers.org/online/article/ironshoes.

The cast features Angel Adedokun, Kelly Atkins, Caitlin Tabancay Austin, Kristine Barrett, Briget Boyle, Shira Cion, Melanie Elms*, Juliana Graffagna, Erolina Kamburova, Rowena Ritchie, Travis Rowland*, Sharon Shao, Michele Simon, Erin Mei-Ling Stuart*, and Beth Wilmurt*

The creative team features Alina Bokovikova (Costume Designer), Michelle Carter (Playwright/Librettist), Shira Cion (Kitka Executive Artistic Director), Ai Ebashi (Assistant Director), Brooke Jennings (Costume Design Assistant), Gregory Kuhn (Sound Designer/Engineer)†, Janet Kutulas (Composer/Lyricist/Music Director), Devon Labelle (Props Designer), Sarah Leonard (Dramaturg), Sean Riley (Set Designer), Erika Chong Shuch (Director/Choreographer‡), Allen Willner (Lighting Designer)

*Member of the Actors' Equity Association

†Member of United Scenic Artists Local 829

‡Member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), a national labor union representing stage directors and choreographers

Calendar Listing

WHAT: Shotgun Players and Kitka Women's Vocal Ensemble present the world premiere of *Iron Shoes*, a folk opera based on Eastern European fairy tales reimagined for our times, directed by Erika Chong Shuch.

WHEN: Thursday, March 15–Sunday, April 15, 2018 | Opening night: Thursday, March 22

WHERE: [The Ashby Stage, 1901 Ashby Avenue, Berkeley](#)

TICKET PRICES: Pay-what-you-can previews: March 15–21. Regular tickets: \$25–\$40. Advance reservations strongly advised. Shows will sell out!

For more information, go to shotgunplayers.org, email boxoffice@shotgunplayers.org, or call 510.841.6500.

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About the Creators

Michelle Carter, Playwright/Librettist

Michelle Carter is a two-time recipient of the PEN Center USA Award in Drama. She has also received the Susan Glaspell Award, the Ebell Playwright Prize, the PEN Center West Award, and the Backstage West Garland Award. Her plays have been performed in San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, London, Moscow, and other far-flung locales. Music theater projects include *DREAMSPIEL*, a ukulele opera with the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain. She has published plays with Dramatic Publishing and a novel with Penguin Books.

Janet Kutulas, Composer/Lyricist/Music Director

Janet Kutulas has been a Kitka singer and co-director since 1988. She has toured extensively with Kitka in the US as well as in Eastern Europe. As a composer/arranger for the group, she's been the recipient of commissioning awards from the East Bay Fund for Artists, the NEA, the MAP and Creative Work Funds, New Music USA, and the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation. Previously she was a flutist with the California Symphony, the Berkeley Symphony, the Illinois Philharmonic, and was a founding member of the Earplay New Music Ensemble.

Erika Chong Shuch, Director/Choreographer

Interested in expanding ideas around how performance is created and shared, Erika Chong Shuch's work has been performed in city halls, theaters, industrial offices spaces, and food courts. Her original performance works have been supported and commissioned by Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor, Intersection for the Arts, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, the deYoung Museum, Headlands Center for the Arts, Djerassi, Dancers' Group, Liz Lerman's Dance Exchange/Corcoran Gallery/DC, and in Korea: Daejeon Metropolitan Company, Chang Mu Company, Mullae Art Space.

Erika has directed two award-winning projects for Shotgun Players—Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* (2015) and Jenny Schwartz's *God's Ear* (2010). She has also designed choreography for the company.



About the Producers

Shotgun Players

Now celebrating its 27th season, Shotgun Players is a company of artists determined to create bold, relevant, and affordable theatre that inspires and challenges audience and artist alike to re-examine our lives, our community, and the ever-changing world around us.

Nothing excites Shotgun more than taking on projects that other companies might deem too expensive, too unwieldy, or just plain impossible. Our commitment to new play development has made Shotgun Players a vital part of the arts community in the Bay Area and beyond. Shotgun celebrated its 20th anniversary with an entire season of new works, and put a stake in the ground by producing a year of all female playwrights in 2015.

More at shotgunplayers.org.

Kitka Women's Vocal Ensemble

Now celebrating its 39th season, Kitka is an American women's vocal arts ensemble dedicated to cultivating community through the practice of harmony singing. Inspired by music rooted in Balkan, Slavic, and Caucasian women's vocal traditions, Kitka also strives to expand the boundaries of polyphonic folk song as a living and evolving expressive art form by commissioning and creating new works for women's voices and fostering collaborations with some of the world's most compelling traditional and multidisciplinary artists.

Past vocal/theater collaborations of note include *Hecuba* (music by David Lang, direction by Carey Perloff at ACT), *The Rusalka Cycle: Songs Between the Worlds* (music by Mariana Sadovska, direction by Ellen Sebastian Chang at the Malonga Casquelourd Center (Oakland, CA); Kanbar Performing Arts Center (San Francisco, CA); Revolutions International Theater Festival (Albuquerque, NM), Globalize Festival (Cologne, Germany), Giving Voice Festival (Wroclaw, Poland), Mohylanka Academy (Kiev, Ukraine), *The Origin* (music by Richard Einhorn, film by Bill Morrison at ARTSwego, Oswego, NY); and *Vocal Alchemy* (music and direction by Meredith Monk at the Kanbar Performing Arts Center of San Francisco).

More at kitka.org.