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The Night Witches

By

RACHEL BUBLITZ

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(THE NIGHT WITCHES)

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The Night Witches was commissioned by the Egyptian YouTheatre (Jamie Wilcox, Artistic Director). The 2020 world premiere was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. The play was first produced at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City on Oct. 23, 2020.

CAST:

Tatyana	Samantha Nakken
Vera	Lina Boyer
Zoya	Keira Stogin
Irina	Katie Calderone
Polina	Alexis Pullen
Serafima	McKinley Barr
Raisa.....	Grace Cawley
Alexandra.....	Shelice Warr
Valentina	Talia Heiss
Marta	Jessica Graham
Nina.....	Francesca Hsieh
Ten.....	Lauren Nesor
Eleven	Ella Murphy
Company	Victoria Arlofski
Company	Taryn McClure

PRODUCTION:

Director	Alexandra Harbold
Assistant Director.....	Victoria Wolfe
Set Design	Ariana Hatch, Abish Noble
Costume Design.....	Mae Hinton-Godfrey
Assistant Costume Design	Kylarr Pullen
Lighting Design	Rachael Harned
Media Design.....	Gavin Yehle
Original Music and Sound Design.....	Katelyn Limber
Dramaturgy	Francesca Hsieh
Scenic Charge Art	Halee Rasmussen
Prop Design.....	Arika Schockmel
Assistant Prop Design.....	Dee Dee Palmer
Technical Director.....	Kyle Becker
Production Manager.....	Amber Bielinski
Assistant Production Manager	Laney Marsella
Stage Manager	Maxwell Paris
Assistant Stage Manager.....	Bryn Swain, Elizabeth Wiand, Kalista Vordos

For my sisters, Anna and Kelly.
My forever heroes.

The Night Witches

CHARACTERS

TATYANA: Captain.

VERA: Recently trained to be a navigator; formerly worked as a mechanic.

NINA: Also trained recently to be a navigator, like Vera.

IRINA: Captain.

POLINA: Deputy commander.

SERAFIMA: Captain.

ZOYA: Commander.

RAISA: Head mechanic.

ALEXANDRA: Navigator.

VALENTINA: Pilot.

MARTA: Navigator.

SETTING: A makeshift airfield put together by the 46th Guards Bomber Regiment, also known as the 588th Air Regiment, near the Eastern Front.

TIME: World War II.

PRODUCTION NOTES

CASTING: Diversity is encouraged in casting including the age, race and ability of actors. These roles can be played by any female-identifying actor, as well as nonbinary actors who are comfortable playing female characters.

The ages of the characters are also flexible; the cast can be played entirely by actors in high school or college or can range in age from early/late teens to 50 or older. The youngest Night Witches were in their mid-teens, young women who lied about their age in order to serve, and ranged to women serving in their 40s and 50s.

MUSIC: The song “Marina” is inspired by the Russian WWII song “Katyusha.” The lyrics were co-written with Chelsea Cowley, who also arranged the music. In the premier production, the tempo of the song varied based on the emotions of the scene. Please feel free to modify the tempo as needed for your production. Sheet music can be found in the back of the book.

RUSSIAN IDIOMS: A guide explaining the Russian idioms used throughout the play can be found in the back of the book.

The Night Witches

SCENE 1

(Dim or low lights come up. Two benches are onstage in a “T” shape, with the horizontal line of the “T” downstage.

The whole cast stands in front of the benches, facing the audience. These numbers can be distributed differently for a larger ensemble.)

ALL *(yelling)*. Motherland is calling!

(The ensemble breaks up to form a Po-2, either all at once, in pairs, or individually.)

ONE. Plywood.

TWO *(yelling)*. The Russian people will never fall to their knees!

THREE. Canvas.

FOUR *(yelling)*. Our cause is just. The enemy will be crushed!

FIVE. Screws.

SIX. Bolts.

SEVEN *(yelling)*. Death to fascism!

(The plane is formed. Some may have material to stretch to form the wings, one may be still preparing to be a propeller. There is no pilot or navigator; they are the plane itself.)

EIGHT. Propeller.

NINE. Wings.

TEN. Engine.

ELEVEN (*yelling*). Be a pilot! Contribute to the power of the Air Force!

(The engine starts.

It's slow to start. The noise of the engine comes from the cast. It is rhythmic and musical. This can be a few cast members with staggered start times, or all of them at once.)

TWO. No window.

Just wind.

ONE. Wind.

Wind.

Frozen wind.

TEN (*yelling*). Defend moscow!

FOUR. Crew: one pilot, one navigator.

Wingspan: 11.4 meters.

Length: 8.17 meters.

Height: 3.1 meters.

THREE (*yelling*). You—how have you helped the front?

SEVEN. Maximum speed: 152 kilometers per hour.

FOUR. Rate of climb: 2.78 meters per second.

ELEVEN. Range: 630 kilometers.

FIVE (*yelling*). If you are surrounded, fight till the last drop of blood!

SIX. Armament: bombs; six 50 kilogram bombs.

EIGHT. Six bombs loaded by hands.

ONE. Six bombs held in flight.

FIVE. On board a plane made mostly of—

SIX. Plywood.

THREE. Canvas.

TEN (*yelling*). Let us not give up the gains of October!

SIX. Flown through the night.

SEVEN. In a consistent rhythm.

NINE. Do not allow the enemy to sleep.

ONE. Plywood. Canvas. Screws. Bolts.

SEVEN. They called us the Night Witches.

EIGHT. Flying in our Po-2s.

NINE. Our *Kukuruznik*.

EIGHT. Planes of plywood. Canvas. Screws. Bolts.

SEVEN. Propeller. Wings.

FOUR. Engine.

SEVEN. Two-person crew.

EIGHT. Pilot and navigator.

TEN (*yelling*). In the sky, on the ground, in the sea—I swear
to defeat the enemy!

EIGHT. We float.

We flutter.

ELEVEN (*yelling*). We fly!

(They take off. They soar through the sky.

*The sounds of the plane stop abruptly, but they are still in
flight.)*

ONE. We cut the engine—

THREE. Approaching in a hush.

FIVE. Then drop—

TWO. One, two, three, four, five, six—

FOUR. Bombs.

*(Cast members whistle, sounding the noise of the six
dropping bombs.)*

ELEVEN. Six bombs.

NINE. Pushed out by hands.

(The bombs explode.)

SEVEN. And then a steep climb up, up, up, up—

TWO. Don't get caught in the firestorm.

THREE. In your plane of—

EIGHT. Plywood.

FOUR. Canvas.

SIX. Screws.

FIVE. Bolts.

(The engine noise comes back, full force all at once. They fly for their base.

They land.

The propeller slows. The engine sounds stop, slowly, but quicker than the original start-up toward the top of the scene.

Maybe the cast returns to the original line.)

ONE. They prepare.

SIX. Seven more missions this night.

TEN. Forty-two more bombs.

EIGHT. Loaded. Held. Pushed out.

THREE. By hands.

TWO. In plywood.

FIVE. Canvas.

ELEVEN. Screws.

NINE. Bolts.

EIGHT. All night.

ONE. Every night.

ALL (*yelling*). For motherland!

TWO. “To fly a combat mission is not a trip under the moon.

Every attack, every bombing is a dance with death.”(*)

Serafima Amosova-Taraneko, pilot, deputy commander,
46th Guards Bomber Regiment.

*(*Quote from A Dance With Death: Soviet Airwomen in
World War II by Anne Noggle.*

*Perhaps all exit but TEN, or maybe TEN steps forward in
the line.)*

TEN. Marina Raskova.

Daughter to an opera singer and a teacher.

First woman to become a navigator in the Soviet Air Forces.

First woman to teach at the Zhukovsky Air Academy,

Awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union award in 1938 for
setting an international women’s record for a straight-
line distant flight from Moscow to Komsomolsk, over six
thousand kilometers.

Marina Raskova. Mother of the Night Witches.

Petitioned Stalin with her fame and a rousing speech
delivered at an anti-fascist meeting:

“Soviet woman—” Marina clamored. “She is the hundreds
of drivers, tractor operators and pilots, who are ready at any
moment to sit down in a combat machine and plunge into
battle. Dear sisters! The hour has come for harsh retribution!
Stand in the ranks of the warriors for freedom!” (*)

On the 8th of October, 1941, only one month after her
speech, Stalin agreed.

And three combat regiments of women were formed.

Women trained to be pilots, navigators, ground support staff and engineers.

Marina Raskova hand-picked all of the four hundred original recruits who ranged from seventeen to twenty-six years old, though there have been rumors of young women embellishing their birth date in order to join.

They compressed training that typically took years into a few months, working fourteen- to sixteen-hour days.

Known as the Summer Patriots.

They comprised the 586th, the 587th and the 588th Air Regiments.

Marina Raskova, whose plane met severe weather in 1943.

Marina Raskova, who crash landed into the Volga bank when the weather grew worse.

Marina Raskova, who didn't live to fly one single combat mission.

Marina Raskova.

Marina Raskova.

Marina.

Marina.

All of this was because of you.

Marina.

*(*A section of a speech given by Marina Raskova on Sept. 8, 1941.)*

SCENE 2

(Late afternoon, just before the sun will set and the first plane will take off for the night.

A makeshift airfield along the Eastern Front.

TATYANA, VERA, SERAFIMA, NINA, IRINA, VALENTINA, MARTA and ALEXANDRA are onstage. They are all in uniform except for their boots. VERA's and NINA's uniforms show less wear than the others.

A line of boots are off to one side of the stage, ready, waiting.

IRINA, MARTA, VALENTINA, ALEXANDRA and NINA sit in a cluster embroidering scraps of fabric, mostly flowers, but possibly also a bird or other animals.

VERA is working on the plane with tools.

SERAFIMA is curling her hair.

TATYANA is center of the action. She sings; perhaps she also plays a guitar. The song is inspired by the Russian WWII song "Katyusha.")

TATYANA (*singing*).

CHAMOMILE BLOSSOMING, IN THE FIELDS THEY
OVERFLOWED

THEIR SWEET SCENT IN THE AIR, DANCING
THROUGH THE GENTLE BLOW

MARINA WALKED BESIDE THEM, OUR SHEPHERD
TO THE SKY

GRAZING THEIR PETALS AS SHE PASSED BY
SINGING ABOUT A GREY STEPPE EAGLE
AND HER GREAT MOTHERLAND

A SMILE BROKE ACROSS HER FACE, AS A PLANE
FLEW OVERHEAD

"FLY TRUE, BRAVE PILOT," SHE CLAMORED
PROUD

"RUSSIA NEEDS YOU NOW"

MARINA GATHERED A SINGLE FLOWER,
PLUCKING PETALS

ONE BY ONE
 A CHILD'S GAME OF FATE AND LOVE
 CHEERING ON THE WOMEN IN PLANES ABOVE
 ANOTHER SMILE, THE FINAL PETAL SPELLED
 VICTORY FOR
 THE MOTHERLAND LEAVING RUSSIA PROUD
 THE FLOWERS JOYOUS FOR THE WITCHES IN THE
 CLOUDS
 FROM TIP TO EDGE IN THIS GREAT LAND,
 MARINA
 LEAD THE CROWD

WE WILL NOT LOSE THE GAINS OF OCTOBER
 WE WILL DEFEND, WE WILL DEFEND
 WE WILL NOT LOSE THE GAINS OF OCTOBER
 WE WILL DEFEND OUR GLORIOUS MOTHERLAND

ALEXANDRA, IRINA, MARTA & VALENTINA
(yelling). We will defend our glorious motherland!

TATYANA, SERAFIMA, ALEXANDRA, IRINA,
 MARTA & VALENTINA *(singing)*.

WE WILL NOT LOSE THE GAINS OF OCTOBER
 WE WILL DEFEND, WE WILL DEFEND
 WE WILL NOT LOSE THE GAINS OF OCTOBER
 WE WILL DEFEND OUR GLORIOUS MOTHERLAND

(Applause from all. TATYANA might take a bow.

NINA goes to VERA.)

NINA. How are you feeling?

(VERA pauses in her work.)

VERA. I am very well. I'm—I am very ready for tonight.

NINA. You can be honest with me. I know my stomach won't stop fluttering.

VERA. I know that feeling; I lost my dinner.

NINA. You should go back for more; you don't want to be hungry.

VERA. I couldn't hold anything down.

NINA. Vera, dear, we've had training.

VERA. Yes, a few days of navigating in broad daylight, even though we will only fly missions in the middle of the night—

NINA. There are no planes to spare at night—

VERA. And then there are the searchlights, machine guns, tanks, they can't even spare us parachutes! The planes aren't able to carry their weight, they say—

(NINA puts a hand on VERA.)

NINA. We will do well. I can feel it. Truly.

(IRINA crosses to join VERA and NINA.)

VERA. I don't know, Nina. I don't know if I can—what if the bombs are jammed? They—we were told to just push it out by hand! We, we are to climb out on the wing? And, and—I can't—how can we be asked—how can we be expected—

NINA. We will live. We will see.

IRINA. It is Vera, yes?

VERA. Yes.

IRINA. Nina has told us all about you, that you are second to only Raisa with your tools.

VERA. I don't know if I could claim that—

IRINA. Nina wouldn't have said it if it wasn't true. You are a great mechanic, and you will make a great navigator. All of us must learn new jobs. You two were mechanics, I started as a navigator, and now I'm a pilot. We are shuffled, moved, put where we are needed. I came straight from university, you know, Marina Raskova herself came to my engineering department! She took all the girls, all of us. Then we had our training. Not long, but enough. Some of the others, like Valentina, Tatyana and Serafima, they belonged to aviator clubs and had experience in flight. I had none. But now I fly just like they do. I was a student, I focused only on my study, but I had to put that aside. After we win the war, I will finish my degree, but I am here to serve in any place Russia needs me until that day. Like you two, yes?

NINA. Yes! Yes of course.

VERA. I only signed up to be a mechanic to give my mother one less stomach to fill.

IRINA. Which was smart of you and good for your family. And just think! You came here hungry, now you are fed and strong. Tonight you will fly. Your mother would be proud. We must be ready for new challenges. Whatever Motherland needs, just as you came here because that is what your mother needed. Maybe soon some of the new girls Raisa is training to fix the planes will be taking your places as navigators.

VERA. Because we will be dead?

IRINA. No Vera, because you will be pilots! That will be exciting, yes?

(IRINA gives VERA an encouraging shoulder squeeze and then returns to the others.)

VERA. Fly the planes? They're going to have us flying the planes—

NINA. Not tonight. Don't worry. She was only trying to get you excited.

VERA. If I become any more excited, my bones will rattle straight out of my skin.

NINA. Why don't you come and sit with us? I find it calming to be with the others.

VERA. No. I—I'd prefer to keep working on the plane.

NINA. Well, if you have a change of heart, there's plenty of thread and fabric for you.

VERA. Of course. Thank you.

(NINA returns to the others. VERA returns to working on the plane.)

POLINA and RAISA enter; they're both in uniform. They wear boots. POLINA was recently injured; she walks with crutches and has a cast on her leg. RAISA goes to the plane and takes down notes. She doesn't notice VERA.

Upon seeing POLINA everyone except VERA stands and salutes her.)

ALEXANDRA. Deputy Commander!

POLINA. Please, it's only me. Sit, sit!

(They sit, except for ALEXANDRA, VALENTINA and IRINA, who walk over to POLINA.)

ALEXANDRA. We were so relieved that your injury wasn't more serious.

POLINA. Breaking my leg was a romp through a meadow compared to all the fuss you lot keep showing me.

RUSSIAN IDIOM GUIDE

“We will live. We will see.”

Said in tough situations meaning that time will make complicated ordeals easier to understand.

“A romp through a meadow”

Actual idiom: “Living [your] life is not like crossing a meadow.” English equivalent: Life was never meant to be easy; life’s no walk in the park.

“Mute as a fish”

Keep quiet, as in keep silent like a fish.

“Don’t look at the teeth of a horse you’ve been given”

Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth.

“If you’re afraid of wolves, don’t go into the woods.”

If you can’t stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen.

“There are no bad planes, only bad pilots.”

Actual idiom: There are no bad ships or winds, there are bad captains.

“Don’t fry your fish before it’s caught.”

Actual idiom: Never fry a fish till it’s caught. English equivalent: Don’t count your chickens before they’ve hatched.

“The first pancake is always lumpy.”

Things don’t work the first time.

“Neither fluff, nor feather!”

Similar to “break a leg,” this is something hunters would say to one another before a hunt in order not to jinx themselves, meaning “good luck.”

“Bravery takes cities”

Courage overtakes obstacles.

Marina

Lyrics by Rachel Bublitz & Chelsey Cowley
Arranged by Chelsey Cowley
Inspired by the Russian song, "Katyusha"

Cam - o - mile blos - som - ing in fields they o - ver - flowed Their sweet

3 sent in the air danc - ing through the gen - tle blow. Mar -

5 in - a walked be - side them our sheph - erd to the sky graz - ing their pet - als as

8 she passed by sing - ing a - bout a grey steppe ea - gle and her

10 great Mth - er - land A smile broke a - cross her face, as a

12 plane flew o - ver - head Fly true brave pi - lot she clam - ored proud

14 Rus - sia needs you now. Mar - in - a gath - ered a sin - gle flow - er pluck - ing