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The Night Witches

(Competition Version)

By

RACHEL BUBLITZ

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(THE NIGHT WITCHES [COMPETITION VERSION])

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The Night Witches was commissioned by the Egyptian YouTheatre (Jamie Wilcox, Artistic Director). This competition version was premiered by the Egyptian YouTheatre at the Great Salt Lake Fringe Festival, Aug. 3-11, 2019.

CAST:

TATYANA..... Chelsea Cowley
VERA..... Katherine Ward
NINA..... E Romero
IRINA..... Karina Barker
POLINA..... Amanda Rossi
SERAFIMA..... Kat Moss
ZOYA..... Laura Fryer
RAISA..... Isabella Andrews
ALEXANDRA..... Keegan Fitlow

PRODUCTION:

Director Alexandra Harbold
Stage Manager Sammee Jackman
Costume Design Candace Summerhays
Sound Design Hyrum Summerhays
Light Design..... Peter Mayhew
Tech Assistant Zachary Barker
Aviation Consultant..... Emma Fox
Producer Jamie Wilcox

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

The Night Witches

(Competition Version)

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.

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 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.

COMPETITION CUTTING: This version of the play is about 60 minutes. For a cutting of about 40 minutes, please omit all action/dialogue in brackets and italics.

The Night Witches

(Competition Version)

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.)

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.

TWO. Engine.

FOUR (*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.)

SEVEN. No window.

Just wind.

TWO. Wind.

Wind.

Frozen wind.

FIVE (*yelling*). Defend Moscow!

NINE. 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.

EIGHT. Range: 630 kilometers.

IVE (*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.

SEVEN. Six bombs held in flight.

FIVE. On board a plane made mostly of—

SIX. Plywood.

NINE. Canvas.

EIGHT (*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.

SIX. 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.

NINE. Engine.

SEVEN. Two-person crew.

EIGHT. Pilot and navigator.

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

EIGHT. We float.

We flutter.

NINE (*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.)

SIX. 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.

NINE. Forty-two more bombs.

EIGHT. Loaded. Held. Pushed out.

THREE. By hands.

TWO. In plywood.

FIVE. Canvas.

SEVEN. 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.)

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 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, 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 (*yelling*). We will defend our glorious motherland!

TATYANA, SERAFIMA, ALEXANDRA & IRINA (*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—

(*IRINA crosses to join VERA and NINA.*)

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.*

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 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 are 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 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.

ALEXANDRA. You're an officer now—

POLINA. For now I am. I hope they return me to the sky once my leg heals up.

[IRINA. I thought your promotion was permanent?

POLINA. Not if I have anything to say about it.

*IRINA. Then you ought to think about not doing your job so well—
I've heard you gave top-notch training to the new navigators.*

POLINA. Well of course, I couldn't do anything less.]

ALEXANDRA. They kept promoting Zoya, you know, even after she recovered. They could make you commander one day.

POLINA. Commanders don't fly in sorties through the night, though.

IRINA. No, they run them.

ALEXANDRA. Other than Zoya, I can't think of anyone more deserving.

[POLINA. Any of you could easily, it's just setting out plans, training new recruits; none of it compares to being up in the sky with the Germans screaming down your neck.]

IRINA. I'd wager that death-defying landing you pulled off caught you some attention! There's no going back now.

POLINA. Oh yes, such a great landing that was, destroying my plane, nearly killing myself and poor Larisa.

ALEXANDRA. You saved her life!

IRINA. I couldn't have pulled off that landing! Plane stalled, navigator knocked unconscious—

ALEXANDRA. Not to mention they were upside down—

[IRINA. A lesser pilot would have panicked.]

ALEXANDRA. A lesser pilot wouldn't have survived.

IRINA. Don't look at the teeth of a horse you've been given.]

POLINA. That's enough, thank you.

(IRINA and ALEXANDRA salute POLINA.)

IRINA. As you command.

POLINA. And stop with the formalities!

(POLINA, IRINA and ALEXANDRA continue their conversation.)

As RAISA assesses the plane, she discovers VERA's legs sticking out from under it. RAISA kicks VERA.)

RAISA. Vera! What are you doing?

(VERA emerges from under the plane.)

[RAISA (cont'd). This is no longer your duty!]

VERA. I was only making small adjustments—

[RAISA. I should have known that's where we'd find you. Have you had your meal?]

VERA. Yes. With the others.

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

Marina

16 G7

pet - als one by one A Child's game of fate and love cheer - ing on the

18 Cm Eb

wom - en in planes a - bove A - noth - er smile the fin - al

20 Ab Cm Fm Cm G7 Cm

pet - al spelled vic - t'ry for the Moth - er - land leav - ing Rus - sia proud The

23 G7

flow - ers joy - ous for the witch - es in the clouds From

25 Cm Eb

tip to edge in this great land Mar - i - na lead the crowd We will not lose the

28 Ab Cm Fm Cm Eb

gains of Oc - to - ber We will de - fend, we will de - fend We will not lose the

31 Ab Cm Fm Cm G7 Cm

gains of Oc - to - ber We will de - fend our glo - ri - ous Moth - er - land.