

Night Witches DC Press Release - **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Night Witches - a New Play about the WWII Soviet Female Fighter Pilots to be workshopped at local airports and the Hylton Performing Arts Center



Photo by: Stephanie Dougher. *Night Witches* cast on Ground Rush Farm (from left-right) Madeline Barr, Maggie Ronck, Elizabeth Chahin, Elena Kritter (Director/Producer), Josephine Cooper, Alexis Ingram, and Alida Rose Delaney (Associate Producer).

NIGHT WITCHES, a new play following the true story of the first all-female Soviet combat pilots of the 46th Guards Night Bomber Regiment, will be performed at The Hylton Performing Arts Center on October 7th at 7:30PM and October 8th at 7:30PM. Tickets are \$25.

The Night Witches or “nacthexen,” were named by the Germans for the “whooshing” sound of their repurposed Polikarpov-2 (PO-2) crop-dusting biplanes, made of canvas and plywood, as they dropped bombs. The Night Witches, were one of three female units in the 122nd Air Group, founded by aviatrix Marina Raskova, a Russian equivalent of Amelia Earhart in celebrity and skill. The women ranged between ages 19 and 26 years old. Of the 112 members, 24 of them were named “Hero of the Soviet

Union”, and became the most decorated regiment in Soviet history. The regiment flew for 3 ½ years, completing more than 24,000 nighttime bombing missions across the Eastern Front.

In April 2017, Elena Kritter and six other female theater artists from New York City, Boston, and the Dominican Republic devised *NIGHT WITCHES* in artist residency in a crop-dusting airplane hangar on Ground Rush Farm in Culpeper, VA. It was developed from scratch in just one month, with script, direction, sets, and costumes all created by the artists. At Ground Rush, they had access to crop-dusting helicopters as well as an airplane hangar for research and inspiration. They read Anne Noggle’s, [A Dance With Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II](#) (a compilation of interviews done with surviving Night



Witches in 1992) and other research on the lives of the female pilots. The farm’s aesthetic was similarly inspirational – the artists incorporated found materials, flood-lights, and a contemporary perspective on the women’s uniforms into the project.

“We want to bring this show back to the DC/Virginia area to honor the resources used in making this show.” says Executive Producer Elena Kritter, “The success of sharing this story with the Culpeper, aviation, and artistic communities in this area laid an

incredible groundwork of support for the show. It’s incredible to see these communities unite to see a group of young women tell a story of another generation of women.”

Through conventional realism, physical theatre, music, dance, acroyoga, shadow puppetry, as well as source material directly from Anne Noggle’s book, the audience comes into immediate contact with the women’s stories. In this shared space, the audience witnesses a young generation of women embodying the courage, endurance, and sisterhood of a former generation of women once lost to history. *Night Witches* was devised and created by 7 female interdisciplinary theater-makers– drafting a script in just 3 weeks, staging, lights, costumes, sound-scapes, to name a few.

“We can’t fit all of the incredible accounts from Anne Noggle’s book into the play,” says Associate Producer Alida Rose Delaney. “However, even recognizing the Night Witches place in history is keeping women’s stories alive, especially in today’s climate that tries to belittle female strength, empowerment, and capability. It’s an exciting time to be a woman right now.”

This past April, they held seven sold-out and 5-star reviewed workshop performances in the The Hangar on Ground Rush Farm, Lynchburg College, and at the William Esper Studio in New York City. At the performances, the creators and actors met with members of the 99’s - the International Organization of Female Pilots - who attended the show and have since set into motion connecting with the Air and Space Museum in Virginia. They also met with the Warrenton Chapter of the Virginia Aeronautical Historical Society to share their story. In June they attended the Virginia event “Women Can Fly,” which empowers women in aviation through free flying lessons. Most recently, they have been featured for their aviation research in the National Agricultural Aviation Association magazine’s Summer 2017 issue.

NIGHT WITCHES Phase II will be touring this fall, with performances at the Hylton Performing Arts Center on October 7th and 8th at 7:30PM, October 9th at the Warrenton-Fauquier Airport (free), and October 10th at The Hangar on Ground Rush Farm (free).

NIGHT WITCHES will be directed by Kathleen Anne Hefferon. The play was conceived by and features performances by Madeline Barr, Elizabeth Chahin, Josephine Cooper, Alida Rose Delaney, Alexis Ingram, Elena Kritter, and Maggie Ronck.

NIGHT WITCHES is produced by Ground Rush Productions LLC.

Tickets are available for the Hylton Performing Arts Center may be purchased **September 1st**. For tickets for the Warrenton-Fauquier Airport and Ground Rush Farms, please email nightwitchesplay@gmail.com for reservations.

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