

Souvenirs & Mementos

In 1992, I visited Ukraine for the first time in my life. One evening my relatives introduced me to a kindly old lady—a former piano teacher. Her collection of sheet music was unlike anything I had seen before. It contained all sorts of obscure and forgotten treasures: Russian salon music, Ukrainian potpourri classics, as well as tangos, foxtrots, and other jazzy delights from the 1920s. Some of the scores I was able to take home with me. Today, the Internet helps me discover even more of this repertoire.

When I discovered the “Aviators’ March” (1915-1916) by Mykola Aleksandrov, I knew I had found a gem. But who was Aleksandrov? This was not the composer of the Soviet national anthem. Mykola (Nikolai) was the composer of a Ukrainian kozachok, a couple of sentimental waltzes, and the arranger of “Krasavitsa Kreolka” (Coon Town Chimes, 1902/1905)—a cakewalk by American composer, Harry S. Webster. The march was published by Ivan Chokolov, a Kyiv-born Russian businessman, and distributed within Russia by Jindřich Jindříšek, a Czech businessman also living in Kyiv. Both publisher and distributor supported the creativity of Ukrainian authors and composers despite tsarist prohibitions and potential legal risks.



Ihor Sikorsky’s “Ilya Muromets” (1915 model)

According to Russian sources, the march was inspired by the opening of an Officers’ School of Marine Aviation in Baku in 1915. Ukrainian sources point out that there were plenty of aviators on Ukrainian soil too. The air force of the Ukrainian National Republic, created in 1917, consisted of more than 300 airplanes. There were Ukrainian aviation pioneers like Fedir Tereshchenko and Ihor Sikorsky building their own planes. In 1913, Sikorsky constructed the “Ilya Muromets”—then the world’s biggest four-engine heavy bomber. Today, the world’s biggest airplane is Ukraine’s “Mriya.”

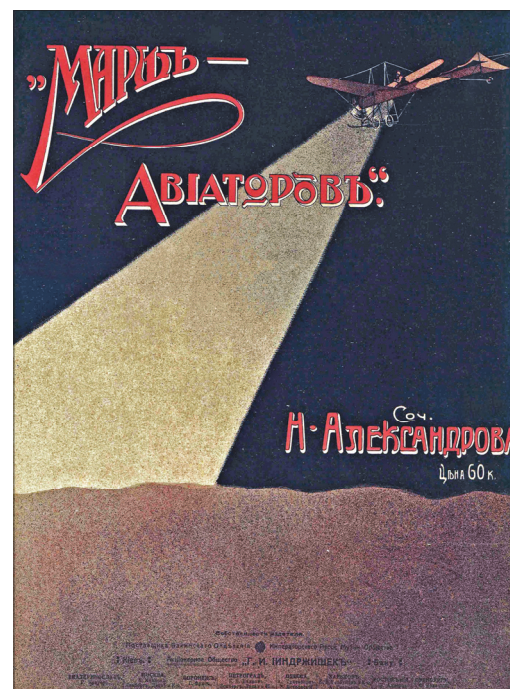
Early sheet music covers show the rapid militarization of aviation, from a romantic outing high above a picturesque landscape to a night-time mission over troubled waters. Nevertheless, the “Aviators’ March” captures the euphoria of the moment.



“Waltz of the Future” (1909)



“Aviator March” (1910-1911)



“Aviators’ March” (1915-1916)