

EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

Songs of Ukrainian World War I Soldiers

By Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

November is the month when we commemorate vital historical events which occurred during the years 1914-1921 in Ukraine. These events were accomplished primarily by the dedicated efforts and heroic deeds of the Ukrainian soldiers serving in the Sich Riflemen and the Galician Army ranks. They bequeathed a rich historical and cultural legacy, one of which is the musical heritage of the Sich Riflemen.

Music, and especially the song, has always been an important part of Ukrainian cultural heritage and consists of a wealth, a treasure trove of different genres of songs. Their lyrics and musical composition is of high quality and sophistication, and have been deemed by critics to be among the most original and beautiful songs in the world. There are those songs which document our historic past, glorify heroic deeds, and grieve over

ruin and devastation; those which express the following: hopes and dreams; teach and describe traditions and rituals; give comfort in moments of sadness; laugh at one's foibles; reproach the weak, the traitors; support and strengthen one's faith; uplift one's spirit to lofty ideals. In other words, the song accompanied all aspects of the Ukrainian way of life, from time immemorial to the present.

During the years of World War I and the Ukrainian fight for freedom and independence 1917-1921, soldiers, of the Ukrainian armies, especially the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen (*Sichovi Striltsi*), created many new songs by composing original melodies and writing appropriate lyrics. These songs achieved great popularity and success and were sung not only during the war, but also for many years even up to the present. Their deeply meaningful, ideological, and patriotic

content was so strong that during the Soviet occupation of Ukraine, it was banned and forbidden to be sung. Anyone who was caught singing one of these songs was jailed, beaten, and even exiled.

Music, and especially songs and singing in wartime, had a constructive purpose, played an important social role in the lives of the soldiers, and the nation or populace. It was a significant tool used during soldiers' training and in battle by the military authorities to bolster the soldiers' morale, improve their fighting efficiency, appease their fears, enhance emotional awakenings of their patriotism and dedication to an ideal. Wartime songs for the populace was a form of propaganda, which helped to promote specific attitudes, support, and a better understanding of the national involvement in war conflicts.

The *Sichovi Striltsi* songs were composed and written by highly educated, professional individuals from Halychyna. They were professors, artists, composers, journalists, poets, lawyers, etc. These who joined the *Sichovi Striltsi* battalion at the outset of the war, took part in fierce battles with the Russian tsarist army, witnessed destruction, tragedies, and death, enjoyed victory and jubilation, sadness, happiness, and joy. All of these emotions were expressed in song. These men formed what they called a special Artistic Sheaf. It organized Army Press Headquarters which was responsible for press releases sent to Ukrainian and European newspapers, informing them about the situation on the war front. The composer



"Zasumui trembitu" (The Trumpet's mournful sound), Post card, E. Kozak, Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford



"Zakvitchaly divchatonka..." (The girls bedecked a soldier's grave), Post card, E. Kozak, Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

Mykhailo Haivoronsky, 1892-1949, composed most of the melodies for the numerous songs and poems, as well as did Lev Lepkyi, 1888-1971, Roman Kupchynsky, 1894-1976, etc. Some folk song melodies were also used with new appropriate lyrics. The lyrics were written mostly by Roman Kupchynsky and Lev Lepkyi.

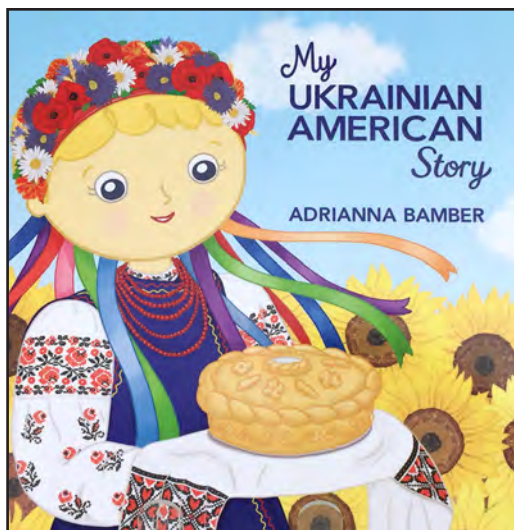
At that time one of the best and most popular songs written was the song "Oi u luzi chervona kalyna" (Oh, the guelder rose in the meadow, bent down). This song became so popular that it is now considered to be "a second national anthem." A Ukrainian folk melody was used for this song and there is still a dispute as to who wrote the lyrics. Other songs were created describing farewells of soldiers marching into battle or of being engaged in battles. For example "Hei vyidno selo pid horoyu" (Look, a village at the foot of the mountain), words and lyrics by Lev Lepkyi; "Ikhav Strilets na viimonku" (Strilets is riding to war), music and lyrics by

Haivoronsky; "Za ridnyi kari, za voliu Ukrainy" (In defense of your motherland, for freedom of Ukraine), lyrics by Kupchynsky, music by Haivoronsky; "Ne smiie buty v nas strakhu" (We dare not have fear), lyrics and music by Kupchynsky. There were also songs of pinning for loved ones, sentimental songs of parting from one's sweetheart, songs of lament for fallen soldiers, e.g., "Zasumui trembitu" (The Trumpet's mournful sound), lyrics and melody by Kupchynsky; "Zakvitchaly divchatonka..." (The girls bedecked a soldier's grave), lyrics and melody by Kupchynsky; and the most poignant song of mourning for fallen soldiers "Zburavli" (The Cranes are Flying). These are just a few of the hundreds of others that were composed at that time and that are still favorites today.

The artist Edvard Kozak immortalized some of these songs in his paintings which he later printed as post cards, two samples of which are included in this article. ❖

Book Review by Museum Director

Msgr. John Terlecky



My Ukrainian American Story, by Adrianna Bamber. (San Francisco, A. Bamber, \$24.99.) To order go to: www.myukrainianamericanstory.com.

Surfing through Amazon's website under "Ukraine" subheadings, I came across an interesting book written and beautifully illustrated for children. It was the first time that I had heard of this title, and I smiled when I came across the name of the author.

Adrianna Bamber grew up in the Ukrainian-American community of New Haven, CT. I remember her parents and grandmother during my days as an assistant pastor at St. Michael Ukrainian Catholic Church there many years ago. Her ethnic her-

itage is rich, having attended both the local Saturday School of Ukrainian Studies and the Plast. Currently, she lives in San Francisco, CA.

The fictional character in this book is named Oksana and she would appeal to girls from third to sixth grades. The book is filled with precious recollections of growing up with Baba and her mouth-watering recipes. So much of the book is replete with various Ukrainian customs, traditions, crafts and music engrained in the memory of a child, who still treasures them even in her adulthood. A lot of work went into the illustrations for the book; they are authentic in tone and just simply

cute. There are colored illustrations of various items—folk costumes, musical instruments, and holiday traditions. The text is in good size print and easily readable for both young and old. I would think that this book might make a nice gift for "Svyatyy Mykolay" pageants or for under the traditional Christmas tree.

The book is also available in a paperback edition (But I prefer the cloth one). The book may be difficult to find. Amazon has just a couple of books on stock. I know that there are copies for sale at The Ukrainian Museum Gift Shop in New York City. Perhaps the easiest way may be to just order the book through the website listed above. ❖