

Anti-Russian fever takes hold of entertainment, music and sports world

David Walsh
28 February 2022

The invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces on Thursday has provided the opportunity for numerous figures in the global entertainment and music world and beyond to join the anti-Russian crusade being promoted by the Biden administration and the governments of the other NATO powers.

In some cases, sincere revulsion against the Putin government's reactionary military intervention, justified on the basis of Russian national chauvinism, is a motivating factor. The invasion is a brutal crime that will result in dividing the Russian and Ukrainian working class and, moreover, serves the predatory interests of US and European imperialism.

However, in general, the responses to the Ukraine events within the upper middle class are not of a principled or carefully considered kind. The Biden government and US media propaganda barrage has had an impact on more privileged layers of the population, those generally susceptible to ahistorical and ignorant moralizing.

We have noted the campaign against famed conductor Valery Gergiev. His appearance conducting the Vienna Philharmonic at New York's Carnegie Hall has been canceled, as has a performance by Russian pianist Denis Matsuev.

Gergiev has now been dropped by his Munich-based management company. The head of the company, Marcus Felsner, said in a statement that in light "of the criminal war waged by the Russian regime against the democratic and independent nation of Ukraine, and against the European open society as a whole, it has become impossible for us, and clearly unwelcome, to defend the interests of Maestro Gergiev."

This kind of statement, which finds countless echoes at present, is merely a capitulation to political pressures and moods and has no bearing on reality. Ukraine is neither a "democratic" nation, its regime, military and paramilitary

forces swarm with fascists and anti-Semites, nor an "independent" one, having become a pawn of the US and the other Western powers, as the run-up to the present crisis demonstrates. In any event, Gergiev is not responsible in the slightest degree for the actions of the Russian military.

The international campaign targeting Russian culture, goods and sports teams has nothing progressive about it. Various politicians in the US and Canada, eager to make a quick name for themselves, have demanded that Russian vodka be removed from liquor store shelves. The Polish, Swedish and Czech national football teams will not play Russia in World Cup qualifying matches.

On Friday, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) issued a statement urging international sports organizations to relocate or cancel their events in Russia and Belarus. The IOC also said that the Russian and Belarusian flags and anthems should not be included or displayed.

The executive committee of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) has decided to move its Champions League final from St. Petersburg to Paris.

The Ukrainian Film Academy has called for an international boycott of Russian cinema and the Russian film industry. "Several films made by Russia are regularly admitted to the programs of most world film festivals, and significant resources are spent on their promotion," the Film Academy's open letter reads.

"The result of this activity is not only the spread of propaganda messages and distorted facts. It also boosts the loyalty of Russian culture—the culture of the aggressor state, which unleashed unjustified and unprovoked war in central Europe." The claim that Russian films do nothing but "spread ... propaganda messages" is simply slanderous. If this is how the Ukrainian film body views filmmaking, it should speak for itself.

The Academy's statement urges the Council of Europe

to kick Russia out of the pan-European film funding body Eurimages, the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production, and appeals to the International Federation of Film Producers Associations to strip the Moscow International Film Festival of its accreditation.

In the US, the call has already been issued by California Democratic Rep. Eric Swalwell for every Russian student to be expelled from the country. How long will it be before internment for Russian immigrants and people of Russian descent is broached?

It was inevitable that Hollywood would be heard from. Much of the Democratic Party opposition to Donald Trump, which found such resonance among prominent actors, writers and others, was rooted in foreign policy differences. Talk show hosts and others loudly complained that Trump was “soft” on Russia, that he was “Putin’s puppet,” and so on. The invasion of Ukraine has opened the floodgates. Hollywood stars are usually available when a “human rights campaign” officially backed by a Democrat in the White House and the media comes into view. Expressions of sympathy with the Ukrainian people are relatively cheap and easy, especially when they are not accompanied by any understanding of the events and history in question.

A representative of Vice Studios confirmed to the *Hollywood Reporter* February 24 that actor Sean Penn “is on the ground in Ukraine” to make a documentary. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s office released a statement on Facebook announcing Penn’s presence. “Our country is grateful to him for such a show of courage and honesty,” the statement asserted.

The *Reporter* explained that Penn later sent the publication a message condemning “the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin while supporting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and encouraging Americans to get involved.”

“Already a brutal mistake of lives taken and hearts broken, and if he doesn’t relent, I believe Mr. Putin will have made a most horrible mistake for all of humankind,” Penn said. “President Zelensky and the Ukrainian people have risen as historic symbols of courage and principle. Ukraine is the tip of the spear for the democratic embrace of dreams. If we allow it to fight alone, our soul as America is lost.”

The notion that Ukraine is “the tip of the spear for the democratic embrace of dreams” is simply delusional. Penn has gone from criticizing George W. Bush and the “war on terror” in the early 2000s to shilling for the US State Department.

Absurdly, filmmaker David Lynch intervened in a YouTube video in regard to the Ukraine invasion. Lynch addressed Putin, telling him, “We are, as human beings, charged as to how we treat our fellow man. And there is a law of nature, a hard and fast law. There’s no loopholes, there’s no escaping it.” Lynch went on. “And this law is: What you sow, you shall reap. And right now, Mr. Putin, you are sowing death and destruction, and it’s all on you.” Lynch continued, “The Ukrainians didn’t attack your country. You went in and attacked their country. And all this death and destruction is going to come back and visit you.”

Where were Lynch and other heroes like him, who now apparently oppose “governments attacking countries that didn’t attack them,” when the US military was unleashing devastating “shock and awe” on the capital of Iraq, Baghdad, immediately killing thousands and eventually destroying an entire society? The Iraq invasion, based on nothing but lies, has resulted in more than one million dead. We don’t recall hearing from Mr. Lynch at the time.

Where were such people, including IOC and UEFA officials, when American forces invaded and occupied Afghanistan for two decades, resulting in social and economic devastation and the deaths of hundreds of thousands? Where were these indignant souls when the CIA and the American military was abusing and torturing countless victims in “black sites” all around the world?

How many US musicians and performers were boycotted over Washington’s war crimes in the Middle East and Central Asia? How many sporting events and international bodies closed their doors to US teams and competitors?

The stampede to denounce everyone and everything Russian is hypocritical and dangerous.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact