

Ukraine's Zelensky at the Grammy awards and the promotion of US war aims

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Music fans watching the Grammy awards on Sunday night may have been startled by the videotaped appearance of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who issued an appeal for those in attendance and watching at home to “support us, in any way you can.”

The appearance was widely described in the media as a “surprise.” In effect, the music industry, undoubtedly under immense pressure from the Biden administration, imposed Zelensky on the millions watching the awards ceremony.

Certainly, in “a room of sparkly bodices and artfully oversize jackets,” as one commentator put it, some were susceptible to Zelensky’s appeal. Millionaire celebrities made up a portion of the audience. Decades of glorifying wealth and encouraging backwardness by the recording industry and its leading lights have taken their toll. The awards ceremony, held at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas, contributed its own share of vulgarity and crassness to the world.

But there is also a degree to which many in-person attendees and television viewers became a captive audience. The government is determined not to give anyone a choice but to be subjected to its relentless war propaganda, which is increasingly institutionalized.

Various hints have been dropped in the press that Zelensky’s appearance at the Grammys was meant to compensate in some fashion for the failure of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to provide him a platform at their ceremony March 27. The unhinged Sean Penn had threatened to destroy his Oscars if the Ukrainian president were not allowed to address the audience at the Academy Awards. The ceremony’s co-host comic Amy Schumer indicated that she too had “pitched” having Zelensky deliver remarks at the event. For whatever reason, that did not come to

pass.

In any case, Zelensky’s comments at the Grammys, made in English, were designed to win the support of susceptible, affluent petty bourgeois types, those happy to be on the side of the Biden administration and the establishment media, drawn toward vague proclamations about “freedom” and “love” and unlikely or unable to examine the rhetoric and the current conflict itself with any rigor.

Zelensky, attempting to pull on the audience members’ heartstrings, described war, with its “silence of ruined cities and killed people” as the “opposite” of music. “Our musicians,” he went on, “wear body armor instead of tuxedos. They sing to the wounded in hospitals. Even to those who can’t hear them.”

The Ukrainian president, of course, stayed very far away from any concrete discussion of the causes of the war and the circumstances under which it erupted. He remained entirely in the realm of banalities and unproven assertions. “We defend our freedom,” he asserted. “To live. To love. To sound. On our land, we are fighting Russia which brings horrible silence with its bombs. The dead silence.”

In reality, Zelensky presides over a regime infested by fascists and neo-Nazis that has outlawed most opposition parties and has overseen the vast impoverishment of the Ukrainian population. The president is a pawn of the US and NATO, a front man in their war drive against Russia, intended to advance the geopolitical interests of American and Western imperialism.

Zelensky worked ceaselessly with Washington to provoke the Putin regime into its reactionary, miscalculated invasion. As the fighting has demonstrated, “freedom-loving” “little” Ukraine is armed to the teeth with tens of billions of dollars of the

most advanced weaponry.

The American media effusion over Ukraine is one of the most mendacious in history. It lives up to what was once said about the “patriotic press” on both sides during World War I, that “hacks of all political shades” were putting out “as many lies as has been seen since the creation of the world.”

It is this 24-hour-a-day propaganda onslaught Zelensky had in mind when he told the Grammy audience “to tell our story. Tell the truth about this war on your social networks, on TV.” If the truth “about this war” were actually told and widely known, Zelensky would not have dared to show his face Sunday night, nor would the event’s organizers have had the audacity to invite him.

Zelensky was followed Sunday night by John Legend singing his new song “Free” with Ukrainian flags waving in the background, accompanied by Ukrainian singer Mika Newton, musician Siuzanna Iglidan and poet Lyuba Yakimchuk.

In his various comments about the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Legend does not indicate the slightest knowledge about the history of the region or the role of the US in inciting the war. The possibility of opposing the Russian invasion without lining up behind Biden, the American military and the other NATO governments and armed forces did not occur to Legend or anyone else speaking at the Grammys.

Legend told the media he wrote “Free” after “a week of seeing the horrific images of the senseless, brutal invasion of Ukraine by a regime with no moral justification—no right to kill, dominate and subjugate the Ukrainian people, no right to silence the will of the people in a democratic nation.” The useless, empty generalities in which the singer-songwriter and others speak, borrowed from CNN, the *New York Times* and the State Department, preclude critical and accurate thought and make certain that they remain within officially acceptable political confines.

Zelensky’s appearance at the awards ceremony Sunday met with universal enthusiasm in the media. The Ukrainian president “gives powerful Grammys speech,” “draws emotional response,” “stuns Grammys with surprise cameo,” etc. No journalist or commentator raised any troubling questions about Zelensky’s claims or the nature of his government, or US war aims. In regard to the crusade for freedom and

democracy supposedly led by Ukraine, as far as American authorities and the major media outlets are concerned, no hint of criticism, no dissenting voices are to be heard.

The hypocrisy of the entertainment industry is enormous. No leader or citizen from any of the countries bombed, invaded or occupied by the US over the last several decades, at the cost of numerous destroyed societies and millions of dead, has ever been invited to address the Grammys or any other awards program. The music industry, a multi-billion-dollar operation dominated by a handful of conglomerates and their fabulously wealthy executives, solidarizes itself with the US-NATO war for economic and social reasons. They identify with Washington’s drive for global economic dominance.

However, the vast majority of artists and music lovers, including many who watched or were present Sunday night at the Grammys, have no interest in becoming billionaires or in world conquest. They will more and more see through and reject all these interrelated phenomena—the war drive, Zelensky and his backers, the giant corporations that organized the Grammys and the vastly overrated celebrities.



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