

Musician Steve Van Zandt propagandizes for imperialist war

James McDonald
3 February 2023

Steve Van Zandt, longtime member of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, took the stage Wednesday night in Tampa for the first concert of Springsteen's 2023 tour sporting a Ukrainian flag-painted guitar.

On Thursday evening, Van Zandt posted a picture of himself with the guitar on Twitter and tweeted,

My tribute and show of solidarity with Ukraine opens the show ... No Retreat! No Surrender!

Van Zandt's reactionary, bloodthirsty comments would have no significance whatsoever—they would simply be more prowar propaganda from the wealthy upper middle class in America—were it not for his celebrity and his musical history.

He and Springsteen are embarking on an international tour of stadiums and large arenas where the blue and gold guitar will almost certainly continue to be displayed. The concerts will be dutifully uploaded to YouTube by countless fans and viewed thousands and, all told, perhaps millions of times. Such barnstorming on behalf of US imperialism must be answered.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has been clear and consistent in denouncing the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine as a brutal action taken by a Moscow oligarchy desperate to preserve itself. The WSWWS has been equally consistent in condemning the US and NATO belligerence that deliberately provoked the invasion and that has used Ukraine and its people in a long premeditated proxy war against Russia.

Over the last three decades, the anti-Soviet/anti-Russia NATO military alliance has metastasized steadily eastward, engulfing Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic states, among other countries, bordering former Soviet states Belarus and Ukraine and essentially encircling Russia to its west. This three-decade expansion of NATO has constituted one long provocation of Moscow and a slow prelude to World War III.

Furthermore, in 2014, the US, with the help of Germany, orchestrated the overthrow of a pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich, in the so-called Maidan revolution. This coup was carried out largely by far-right forces aligned with the Right Sector organization and the Svoboda party. These fascist forces, represented in the war with Russia by the notorious Azov Battalion, revere the memory of Ukrainian nationalist and Nazi

collaborator Stepan Bandera.

It is this repugnant political and military element that the US and NATO are now arming with the most advanced weaponry the West has to offer in their attempt to destabilize and dissolve Russia as a coherent political and economic entity capable of promoting and defending its own interests.

What do the Western imperialist powers—led by the US and Germany—hope to gain through such a war? They seek nothing less than control of the tremendous natural resources—arable land, oil, natural gas and critical minerals such as lithium and cobalt—and the geostrategic advantages afforded by the Russian landmass, primarily the opportunity to militarily encircle China. In their desperate pursuit of these maniacal ends, US capitalism and its allies of convenience in NATO have demonstrated in word and deed that they are willing to risk the nuclear annihilation of millions, perhaps billions, of the world's people.

Meanwhile, in Washington and Berlin and London, the propaganda campaign for WWII has been concocted and disseminated to every daily newspaper, every local news station, every celebrity awards program: Ukraine, a beacon of democracy, has been violated by yet another evil autarch on the world stage, this time bearing the name Putin. No explanation is to be found or sought for in this clash of vast armies along a front contested in the Napoleonic wars, World War I and World War II. No explanation but the malignant heart of Vladimir Putin. So say the military experts on *Meet the Press*, so say the pundits in the *New York Times*, so say the actors receiving Golden Globes, and so says Steve Van Zandt's guitar.

In language suggesting he is confusing himself with the mobster character he played on *The Sopranos*, Van Zandt posted this vile tweet on March 1, 2022, five days after the Russian invasion:

Ukraine is sickening. Watching a country be destroyed live on tv. We should call Putin's bluff because he ain't nokin' dick. Wipe out that convoy and say what are you gonna to [sic] about it? All bullies are pussies.

On April 13, 2022, Van Zandt replied to a tweet complaining that the US had not militarily confronted Russia over Ukraine:

I swear I'm getting PTSD from this. This is deeply depressing down to my soul. I have been criticizing our country from a patriotic point of view my whole adult life for the mistakes we have made. But this is by far the worst. I will never again feel the same way about my country.

The worst mistake the US has made in Van Zandt's lifetime is its tardiness in moving toward a new world war. How does a person arrive at such a formulation?

In January 2023 Van Zandt is still at it, baying for war. On January 16, he tweeted:

Until we give Ukraine the long range weapons to take out some Russian cities this war never ends. It is criminal and cowardly that we haven't. Then again it's criminal and cowardly that NATO watched this terrorism without defending them in the first place.

When someone pointed out that his proposal was "a definition of WWII" that would "send the war to a level the world has never seen before" and that it "would 100% cause a nuclear strike against Ukraine," Van Zandt replied, recklessly echoing every NATO political and military leader,

That's the lie that allowed Putin to bully the world.

Another critic noted that if the US provided such weapons to Ukraine and the latter attacked Russia proper, "we escalate to an active role in this conflict. If Russia is attacked and they know they can't fight us conventional then their only recourse is to use nuclear weapons."

Again, the danger of nuclear holocaust had no impact on Van Zandt's fanatical prowar stance:

People who live as cowards are going to get bullied their entire lives, and nations are no different. Putin should have been stopped at Crimea. And should certainly be recognized as a terrorist and war criminal.

So brave! Fighting to the last Ukrainian and Russian from the safety of a stadium backstage.

On January 19, more of the same:

We are not helping Ukraine enough. Don't believe the hype. Until Russian cities start getting hit this war will never end. We need to give Ukraine the weapons to end the war.

Van Zandt is no stranger to political causes. In the early 1980s, he expressed his support for Poland's Solidarity movement. In 1985, he organized Artists Against Apartheid to record his song "Sun City," a song about boycotting apartheid South Africa. He is a strong Democratic Party supporter.

The musician belongs to a layer of actors and celebrities who are being swept to the right, in the name of defending "democratic" Ukraine, supporting a regime infested with neo-Nazis that has outlawed much of the political opposition.

Van Zandt is hardly alone. The WSWS has commented on the ferocious prowar comments and antics of another former "left," Sean Penn. Actor Ben Stiller, whose father, comic Jerry Stiller, like Penn's, once had left-wing associations, traveled to Kiev last June and told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, "You're my hero." Actress Jessica Chastain, who played a CIA torturer in *Zero Dark Thirty*, also had a personal audience with Zelensky, in August 2022. Mark Hamill, Angelina Jolie, Jean-Claude Van-Damme, David Letterman, Mila Kunis, Ashton Kutcher ... the list goes on and on.

These "celebrities" are using their fame to confuse and pollute public opinion, which is deeply and instinctively suspicious of the US and its endless, bloody wars for "democracy." Van Zandt and presumably Springsteen, who has famously strummed and stumped for such hawks and war criminals as John Kerry, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, are part of this deplorable crowd.

Van Zandt's blue and gold guitar, which in concert will be playing the much admired Springsteen songs of the 1970s and 80s—songs that at their best celebrate a spirit of courage, of loyal friendship, of fun and, if not egalitarianism, at least individual decency—that guitar will at the same time be issuing its appeal for war.

Steve Van Zandt is a very wealthy man. He embodies what has become of layers of the radicalized, semi-bohemian middle class of the 1970s: angry and disoriented, vulgar and self-idolizing. He is choosing not to see the facts about the war in Ukraine that—for anyone old enough to remember the talk of "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq—are standing in plain sight. As the crisis of US capitalism intensifies, much of the affluent upper middle class will join Van Zandt in siding with the ruling elite and its murderous imperialist ambitions. But other artists and intellectuals will orient themselves to the working class, to internationalism and to socialism, the only alternative to the war Van Zandt craves.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact