

Steve Earle Reads Bartolomeo Vanzetti

George De Stefano (March 02, 2008)



The outspoken singer-songwriter Steve Earle, an opponent of the death penalty and a pro-immigrant new New Yorker, reads from the words of the anarchist Bartolomeo Vanzetti.

Steve Earle didn't come by his nickname "the hardcore troubadour" by accident. The Texas-born singer-songwriter is an outspoken leftist who has written pungent and memorable broadsides about the death penalty, the war in Iraq, and the "war on terror."



Here's a clip of Earle reading from the words of Bartolomeo Vanzetti, the immigrant anarchist who, with Nicola Sacco, was executed by the State of Massachusetts in 1927 after a travesty of a trial replete with unabashed dago-bashing.

You may recall that in 2002, Steve Earle caught hell from the corporate media and from outraged right-wingers over his "John Walker's Blues," a song about the captured "American Taliban" John Walker Lindh. Earle's critics absurdly accused him of glorifying terrorism because he wrote the song from Lindh's perspective.

Then, two years later, Earle, not exactly one to be intimidated, released "The Revolution is Now," which he deliberately timed to coincide with that year's presidential campaign. That Earle intended the album to be a political intervention was obvious from songs like "Condi, Condi" and "Rich Man's War." But he also lent the title track to promote Michael Moore's anti-Bush documentary "Fahrenheit 911." With "The Revolution is Now" Earle not only captured the outrage of many Americans over Team Dubya's depredations – he also won the Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk/Americana Album.

Earle just repeated that success in January with a Grammy in the same category for his 2007 album, "Washington Square Serenade." He made the record in New York, where he now lives, with his wife the singer Allison Moorer. The album, one of Earle's best, blends his folk/country blues/rock with urban beats -- country comes to town and gets a taste of hip hop.

Earle told journalist Anthony De Curtis why he decided to leave his longtime home Nashville for New York: "'If you feel like you don't know what America is all about right now, and you want to reorient yourself to what America should be about, it's a really good time to come to New York City," he said. "I needed really badly at this point in my life to see a mixed-race, same-sex couple holding hands in my own neighborhood. It makes me feel safer."

"I've been pretty heartbroken about the way things have gone politically in this country the last few years, and I seriously considered moving someplace else," he said. "Then I figured out that I didn't have to leave the country. All I had to do was come to New York."



Earle lives with Moorer in Greenwich Village, at the intersection of West Fourth and Jones Streets, a location immortalized in the photo of Bob Dylan and Suze Rotolo used for the cover of Dylan's 1962 "Freewheelin'" album. Earle, a Dylan devotee, says he loves to show tourists the exact location where the photo was taken.

He also loves New York for the diversity of its inhabitants, for being a place that welcomes new arrivals and is constantly reinvigorated by them. As he sings on one of the best tracks on his latest album, he's thrilled to be living in a "City of Immigrants."

Benvenuti a La Gran Mela, Steve and Allison.

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