

Barbara Kay: Boycott Roger Waters, rock legend and rabid Israel hater

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Art and political activism make awkward bedfellows. They become unethical bedfellows when activist artists bully politically neutral colleagues into complicity with their cause.

In 2013 lead Animals singer Eric Burdon cancelled an appearance in Israel, intimidated by the relentless anti-Israel “pro-peace” zealots of the Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Other celebrities who have caved to threats of shunning and worse, announcing “scheduling conflicts” with confirmed Israeli dates: Meg Ryan, Carlos Santana, Elvis Costello, Snoop Dogg and Stevie Wonder.

Some celebrities, to their immense credit, have shown more spine in honouring both their Jewish and Arab fans in Israel, amongst others: Elton John, Aerosmith, Celine Dion, Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Britney Spears, Tears for Fears, Guns and Roses, Justin Timberlake and Alicia Keys.

Roger Waters performs the The Wall at the Bell Centre in Montreal on June 26, 2012. Marie-France Coallier/Postmedia News

No entertainer brings more gusto to his coercive BDS proselytism than former Pink Floyd singer/composer Roger Waters. Waters hates Israel with vehemence, and so obsessively that he incorporates anti-Israel diatribes into his performances. Fellow artists who tour in Israel rouse him to public tantrums. His most recent battle was with the band Radiohead, whom he had urged to cancel a summer trip to Tel Aviv. They rejected his overtures — they’ve played in Israel for 20 years and adamantly avoid politicizing their act — but at the cost of an annoying public spat.

Waters’ hostility to Israel clearly crosses the line between legitimate criticism and bigotry. He has stated, “One group of people have stolen the lives of another people and they have to give it back or it has to be taken back.” This isn’t someone demanding an end to West Bank occupation and a two-state solution; this is someone condemning the very notion of Jewish self-determination in their own homeland. If further proof were needed of Waters’ mindlessness on the subject, in a July Facebook video chat with Omar Barghouti, founder of the BDS movement, Waters, asked why he doesn’t speak out about regimes that are worse than Israel, responded, “I’m not sure there are any much harsher regimes around the world actually, if you look at it.”

Roger Waters performs on day 3 of the 2016 Desert Trip music festival at Empire Polo Field on Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016, in Indio, Calif. Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

Roger Waters’ Us & Them Canadian tour begins at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto on Oct 2. You could go and subject yourself to one of his anti-Israel rodomontades as the price for being entertained by him. Or, on the same night, you could attend the Canadian premiere of a documentary film about Roger Waters, presented by B’nai Brith Canada, Wish You Weren’t Here (WYWH), written and directed by Ian Halperin, an undercover journalist specializing in pop culture, author of 16 books, many of them bestsellers, and award-winning filmmaker (Who Killed Kurt Cobain?, Unmasked: The Final Years of Michael Jackson).

While Waters’ Israel-bashing crusade is the lynchpin of the film, WYWH was inspired by Halperin’s distress at rising anti-Semitism around the world, given respectability on the left by lexical legerdemain: it’s not about hating Jews; we just hate Zionism! But as any objective observer can see, amongst single-minded militants like Waters, consumed by rage for every sparrow that falls inside Israel, while exhibiting mere sorrow at the obscene carnage being enacted

outside Israel, it really is all about “the Jooz.”

In the film, renowned lawyer Alan Dershowitz explains to Halperin: “There’s an enormous difference between Waters and (Mel) Gibson (whose recorded rant against Jews in 2006 produced shock waves). Gibson is an old-fashioned, right-wing, theological anti-Semite. That’s an irrelevancy today. Everybody condemns him immediately. Waters on the other hand represents the hard left – young, radical anti-Semitism that’s growing in universities. So Waters is a much more serious problem than Gibson.”

Halperin, son of a Holocaust survivor, told me that the experience of making the film was emotionally wrenching. It involved travelling “all over the world,” working closely with Dr. Charles Small, director of ISGAP, the Institute for the Study of Global Anti-Semitism and Policy. Halperin wrote: “Making this film was a life changer for me. I really had no idea how prevalent and serious contemporary anti-Semitism is.” He was in Paris at the time of the Charlie Hebdo massacre and again for the Bataclan massacre. The events were soul-searing. One can therefore understand why, attending a Waters concert (in the film) and being forced to listen to his anti-Israel tirade, Halperin walked out in disgust (and, he told me, in tears).

In addition to Toronto, the WYWH Canadian tour will include screenings in Edmonton, Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec City and Winnipeg, taking place on the same nights Waters is performing in those cities. Some of the screenings will feature a Q&A with Halperin, as well as B’nai Brith Canada Chief Executive Officer Michael Mostyn, ISGAP’s Dr. Small and other speakers who condemn Waters’ anti-Semitism. Your choice: entertainment with a side of bigotry — or exposure of bigotry with a side of righteous boycott.