

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Dancing With a Deadly Partner

Ann Haskins · Saturday, March 12th, 2022

Over the past weeks the world has been focused on, shocked at, and saddened by the senseless war that Russian President Vladimir Putin has raged against the country and people of Ukraine. Through it all the courage of the Ukrainian people to stand up against the Russian army has been nothing short of astonishing, and I am certain that we all wish that there were more that the world could do for them besides send help that doesn't trigger a direct U.S./Russian war. But this is the world that we are currently living in. And in it lives a former lawyer, comedian, tv star and dancer, yes dancer, who history has cast as David against Putin's Russian Goliath.



President Zelensky speaking to the Ukrainian people during the war with Russia.

Volodymyr Zelensky grew up as a native Russian speaker in Kryvyi Rih, a major city in the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast of central Ukraine, obtaining a degree in law from the Kyiv National Economic University. Rather than practicing law, Zelensky pursued a career in entertainment. He first gained attention as a comedian and his fame rose to a broader public profile when he starred in “Servant of the People”, a hit comedy about a teacher who inadvertently became president of Ukraine. It was after that show ended that Zelensky actually ran for the presidency of Ukraine, as

unlikely a candidate as the character he portrayed in the tv show. Zelensky ran as an anti-establishment, anti-corruption figure and forced then President Petro Poroshenko into a run-off. In the second round, Zelensky won the election with 73.2 per cent of the vote defeating Poroshenko and confirming the widely held opinion that Poroshenko was a puppet of President Putin.



Paddington Bear (voiced by Volodymyr Zelensky in an earlier career). President Zelensky in his current career.

During a 2019 interview with Der Spiegel, Zelensky stated that he decided to enter into politics to help reestablish his people's trust in their leaders and that he wanted "to bring professional, decent people to power." It is safe to say that everyone paying attention to the Ukrainian crises is both surprised and heartened by how he has stood up against President Putin and the entire Russian army.



Zelensky (left) – Dancing with his partner Olena Shoptenko on the Ukrainian edition of Dancing With the Stars

The 24-hour news coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and international stature of Ukraine's articulately defiant president prompted mainstream media outlets to discover more of Zelensky's non-political cred including that he voiced the [Paddington Bear](#) in both movies released in Ukraine and that in 2006, Zelensky was a contestant on the Ukrainian edition of "Dancing with the Stars." In one number, his partner and he were both blindfolded, and like the good dancer/actor/comedian, Zelensky and his partner Olena Shoptenko hit their marks. Not only was he the winner that season, but available clips also show he is a really excellent ballroom dancer! He's now in a more deadly tango with Putin, but dancers know how to make things work, especially when at a disadvantage.

See Zelensky and his partner's dance moves:

(Note: This article was written by Ann Haskins and Jeff Slayton.)

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