

Songs of Szpilman

You could tell that Wendy Lands, a young Canadian singer-songwriter, felt she was onto something from the way she sank her harmonic teeth into the resilient material she was rendering to a packed house.

"A small cafe, a Paris night and a table set for two," she sang in a breathy contralto that sounded like April Stevens. And the tune itself was right out of that pre-war world, a Marlene Dietrich or an Edith Piaf vibe.

"No 'babys' or 'man' in this stuff," Lands commented when she was done. "It's amazingly cool."

The amazing part was that the tune was written 50 years ago by Wladyslaw Szpilman, the protagonist of "The Pianist," Roman Polanski's Oscar-nominated film. The picture is about the survival of Szpilman, a brilliant young Jewish pianist, against staggering odds in a World War II Warsaw ghetto.

After the war, the battered but unbowed Szpilman became director of music for Polish State Radio, kept up his classical playing and continued his pop songwriting on the side. The release of the film spotlighted these charming old antiques, and lyrics were supplied by several hands for enough of them to fill a CD, "Wendy Lands Sings the Music of The Pianist, Wladyslaw Szpilman."

These were receiving their world premiere at the Mint, and Lands just loved them. "This is the most



Tom Ganche

Wendy Lands sings an "amazingly cool" song by "The Pianist" hero.

elegant song I've ever sung," she said before launching into "Dancing With Antonio," which progressed in languorous 4/4 time with wistful Django Reinhardt-style embellishments from the little backup band and many dying falls in the Szpilman harmonies.

"Let's go to bed now, hold me till daylight," the elegant words started off, then rambled through some imitation prewar sentiments: "Love is roulette, there's no safety net" and such.

"When I sang this for the Polish consul at dinner, everybody clapped their hands and hummed along," Lands said. "It's the 'Bye bye, Miss American Pie' of Poland."

"I Wish You'd Ask to Dance With Me" proved to be a different kettle of kielbasa, unfortunately. "Don't you wanna know what might be in store," Lands sang, "perhaps walk me to my door?" That was prim enough, but the music had a decided honky-tonk aura, and her voice took on a twangy aspect that didn't seem appropriate for Warsaw.

A daily directory of studio films for Academy Award consideration

Screenings are generally limited to voting members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Schedules subject to change. Call to RSVP for each film. This guide runs throughout the awards season. Send listings submissions to Harley Land or Karl Gibson, The Hollywood Reporter, 5055 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036 (osg@hollywoodreporter.com) or fax screening info to (323) 525-2377.



©AMPAS®

FRIDAY

ABOUT A BOY (Universal)
7:30 p.m., Variety Preview (S.F.)
RSVP: (888) 832-4396.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS (New Line)
7:30 p.m., Clarity Screening Room.
RSVP: (310) 967-6950.

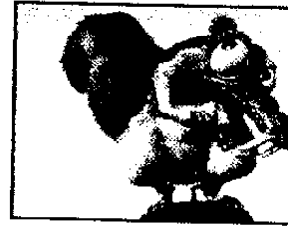
SATURDAY

ICE AGE (Fox)
1 p.m., William Fox Theater.
RSVP: (310) 369-3116.

"Smoke and Mirrors" was approached with a lot more conviction, perhaps because the words were consistent and not so sticky sweet, all about how riding off into the sunset is basically a crock. The music held up quite well enough for a product of that vintage.

"He was a sweet guy, even after all that," someone remarked as the session drew to a close, echoing the words of Szpilman's son Andrzej, who called the music "a testimony to the power of music and the will to live of a man who survived the difficult years in hiding, not least by recalling note by note, bar by bar, every piece of music he had ever played or composed."

"Wladyslaw, we love you!" whooped a patron as Wendy Lands bowed off, her job done. ■



Fox's "Ice Age"

Click Here

A fully searchable list of all Oscar screenings through March is available at www.hollywoodreporter.com/screening

corrections

The name of Dave Durcan, business development manager of Tex Instruments' DLP Cinema, was misspelled (HR 3/2/07).

Taylor Hackford is the director of Crusader Entertainment's "Unchain My Heart: Ray Charles Story" (HR 2/28).

The Hart Sharp Entertainment-produced comedy "Women's Maintenance Club" for New Line will also be overseen by Fine Line. Features director of acquisition production Meredith Finn, who was responsible for bringing the project into the studio (HR 2/27).

10 ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINATIONS

INCLUDING
BEST COSTUME DESIGN
SANDY POWELL

"Gangs of New York may be the last of its kind—a costume picture made entirely in a studio by a superbly creative director in collaboration with master craftspeople, including Sandy Powell."

Amy Taubin, FILM COMMENT

GANGS OF NEW YORK

