

A 'golden' opportunity that's not for my butt

By Lynn Weldamith
special writer

I'd better get to work on that screenplay. Not only because it holds the promise of fame, fortune and freedom from the grind of a daily job, but it's probably the only way I'll ever get to see the Oscars.

Oh, sure I watched them on TV last week as did millions of viewers across the globe. But just once in my life, I'd like to be at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles on Hollywood's most glamorous night of the year, rubbing elbows with the creme de la creme.

I thought I had my wish this year. You see, the people who produce the Academy Awards show—ABC Television—hire everyday people like you and me to be "seat fillers." It may not be a glamorous title, but a seat filler's responsibility is to fill the seat of an Oscar winner when he or she walks up to the stage and makes an acceptance speech.

The idea is to create the appearance of a capacity-filled auditorium when dozens of stars have vacated their seats to accept awards or pose for photographs backstage. When the award winner returns to his or her seat, the seat filler moves on to the next empty seat.

Having learned of this a month before the Oscars and figuring my seat could fill a seat as well as anyone else's, I jumped at the opportunity. First, I called the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences.

"I'D LIKE to apply for the seat filler position," I said. OK, so it didn't sound very glamorous, but when you're talking admission to the Academy Awards, you tend to forget your pride.

The Academy transferred me to ABC who transferred me to the Academy's Board of Governors (whatever that is). The person there told me that only ABC employees are eligible to be seat fillers "for security purposes." Then again, he said, he really wasn't sure. Call ABC.

After several more calls, I eventually was in touch with ABC's Office of Guest Services. Yes, they said, seat filler applications will be accepted on a first come-first served basis and, no, you don't have to be an ABC employee. BUT ABC employees get preference.

Desperate for some leverage, I explained that I was a reporter. Do members of the media get preferential consideration too? The voice on the other end of the line sounded suspicious. The Academy throws on media coverage of seat filling activity, he explained.

What kind of reporter are you? Broadcast or print?

"Print."

"Oh, that's fine. Nobody reads anymore."

He went on to explain that applications would be accepted over the phone on a specific date. Only on that date, he emphasized, and absolutely no letters, faxes or in-person requests would be accepted.

I CALLED on the designated day at the designated time. Not surprisingly an absolutely busy signal greeted me in my car. Though I knew it was hopeless, I kept trying once every 20 minutes. About five hours later, the call actually went through.

"I'm calling about the seat filler position," I said. A very bored-sounding person asked for name, address and telephone number. The Academy looks like people who are "willing to work hard and follow instructions closely," he said.

Was he kidding? What could be so hard about sitting down? If you are chosen for a seat filler position, he continued, you would attend the event at your own expense and you must wear attire appropriate for a black tie function. Yeah, yeah.

Another thing, seat fillers must show up at 11:30 a.m. on the day of the Academy Awards, even though the show doesn't begin until 8 p.m. Pacific time. I guess they figured that after standing around for six hours you'll be plenty anxious to run to the nearest empty seat.

So when do I find out if I'm a seat filler? In about a week, he said. How many volunteers do you need? About 100. How many people have called? Hundreds. Oh.

So much for my short-lived hope to mingle with the paparazzi. But a girl can dream, can't she? Even though this year's Oscar night has passed, I keep having this re-occurring dream.

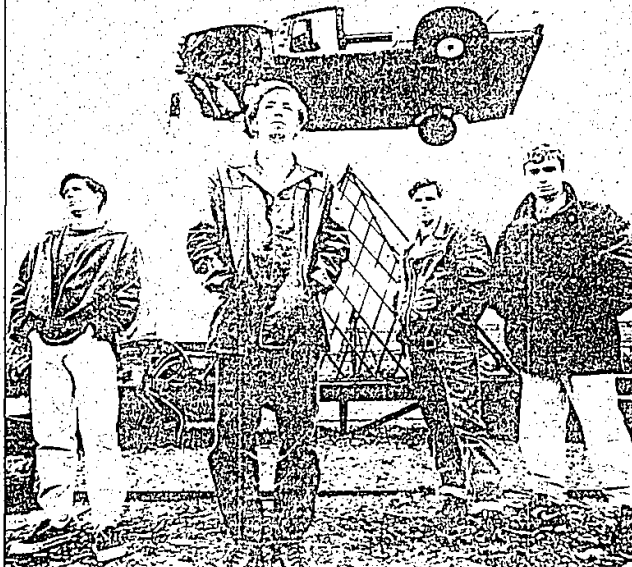
A GQ-ish looking guy with a clipboard gives me the nod. My first seat filler assignment. Am I ready to prepare for the tremendous responsibility? These shoes are killing me. I walk briskly (trying to mask my star-struck expression with what I hope passes for a suave look of sophistication) to an empty seat in the eighth row.

"Tripping over a few feet along the way, head down, mumbling 'excuse me' to the knees of royalty, I finally stumble into a vacant seat. There. Mission accomplished. Glad to know I've done my part to save ABC from the embarrassment of an empty seat by embarrassing myself."

Oh my God, I don't believe it. On my right is Jodie Foster. "Jodie," I whisper, "I'm a big fan of yours. You were brilliant in 'Silence of the Lambs,' though I must say I liked you better as a blonde. You're a shoot-in-for-best actress."

Jodie politely smiles and turns away, so I turn to see who's sitting on left. Gulp. It's her co-star from "Silence of the Lambs," Hannibal the Cannibal, I mean, Anthony Hopkins. I know he was only acting, but the man gives me the creeps. I smile at him nervously. He lifts his lips.

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Members of Live include bassist Patrick Dahlheimer, lead vocalist Ed Kowalczyk, drummer Chad Gracey and guitarist Chad Taylor.

Awards to recognize Motown's musicians

The impetus for the Motor City Music Awards is a noble one. Undoubtedly, though, it's the gift of such an event that always garners the most attention.

Glamour as well as recognition will be featured as members of the Detroit music community congregate for the inaugural awards presentation 7:30 p.m. Sunday, April 12, at Music Hall in Detroit.

The ceremony is designed to reward the accomplishments of today's up-and-coming artists while honoring those who were instrumental in establishing Detroit's rich musical tradition.

Motown great Smokey Robinson and comedian Mike Riley will cohost the extravaganza. Robinson, along with Howard Armstrong and noted CKLW music director Rosalie Trombley, will also receive a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Noted presenters scheduled to appear include Bob Seger and members of the Silver Bullet Band, Alice Cooper and Wax (Not Was).

Those aforementioned celebrities will help present awards in such categories as blues, country, R&B, rap, classical and gospel categories, which are voted on by nearly 2,000 industry professionals. Six awards will be decided by public ballot.

THE MOTOR CITY Music Awards is the culmination of four years of planning. The annual event is organized by the Motor City Music Awards Foundation, which is made up of a cross-section of those involved extensively in the music community—promoters, radio personnel, record company executives and journalists.

"In any event, organizing the first one is a little difficult," said Michael Watts, executive director of the Motor City Music Awards Foundation. "But we've generated a lot of will and community. That's our goal—to create a sense of community."

All proceeds from admission costs (tickets starting at \$25) will benefit music related causes in the Detroit area. The primary beneficiary from this year's event is Music Hall, which is undergoing major renovation. Mon-

ey raised will be matched by a Challenge Grant from the Kresge Foundation.

An awards ceremony of such prominence is overdue considering Detroit's storied musical past with "Black Bottom" blues clubs, Motown, MC5, Iggy Pop, Cooper, Seger and Wax (Not Was). Music communities such as New York, Toronto, Minneapolis and Boston already have similar music awards ceremonies.

Watts, who runs Plymouth-based Watts-UP, is certainly more than familiar with such grand-scale musical events. He's coordinated the annual Detroit Blues Festival, the Downtown Hoodoo country fest and was involved in promoting concerts at Chene Park for four years.

ONE OF his goals is to make the Motor City Music Awards a weekend-long event. Area musicians are scheduled to perform the National Anthem before Detroit Tigers and Pistons games that weekend.

Also, there is a jointly sponsored record and recording seminar presented by American Society of Composers, Authors & Publishers (ASCAP) and National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences (NARAS) 1:30-3:30 p.m. Sunday, April 12, in The Radisson Ponchartraine Hotel's Versailles Room. Admission for the seminar is \$10 at the door (\$8 in advance) with all proceeds benefiting the foundation's projects.

As with the recently successful 1100 Tynes benefit—the Motor City Music Awards marks another joint effort by a music community that has been normally fragmented through competitiveness.

"Because of the nature of the board, we were able to cut through that," Watts said. "The competition between the newspapers and the radio stations is a fact of everyday life. We said you have to put that aside for a cause that benefits the community as a whole."

The first-ever Motor City Music Awards take place 7:30 p.m. Sunday, April 12, at Music Hall. Tickets start at \$25. For information, call 832-2510.

Live gets serious in songs

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

When even U2 has turned down the notch on the door face meter, Live's penchant for seriousness could only be attributed to youthful naivete or a poorly calculated career move.

Give them time. "A lot of people say that," said bassist Patrick Dahlheimer, whose band performs Sunday at the State Theatre. "At this point that's the way it is. Maybe I'll look back a year from now and things will be different."

At least the intensity is harnessed in an indelible form on the Pennsylvania quartet's spirited, uncompromising debut release on Radioactive "Mental Jewelry." Lead vocalist Ed Kowalczyk sings with an emotionally drenched fervor, reflecting a sense of urgency throughout the 12-song effort.

Reoccurring images of pain and angst are a common thread lyrically, which seemingly belies Live's age and experience (the oldest member is 21).

Unlike similar outfits — The Alarm for example — who sustain themselves on emotion as much as musical substance, Live contends it's not under the mistaken belief that music can render change in a complex world.

Rather, the band addresses all the pangs of anxiety and the dire necessity of succeeding associated with constantly re-examining the unsharable state we find ourselves in. At this point, the psychic fallout from that is more appealing to Live than how to conquer the feelings of uncertainty.

SINGS KOWALCZYK in the opening number "Operation Spirit" with undoubted force. "I heard a lot of talk about my spirit/I heard a lot of talk about my soul/But I decided that anxiety and pain were better friends so I let go."

While it is admirable for a band to explore such personal feelings at such a tender age, it still begs the question: Is anyone interested? College/alternative music appears cloistered in an array of cold-techno heartbeats and frivolous flutters of pop at the moment. Which in itself seems to be a reaction to the constant serious expression perpetuated by U2, Simple Minds and Tears for Fears during the '80s.

There's plenty of that stuff (case in point) to listen to. There's enough of that, Dahlheimer said. "I don't have a problem with people doing joyful frivolous stuff. Live may very well be a reaction to the reaction. Undoubtedly, the consciousness of U2 and alike really played somewhat a role in the band's upbringing."

Drummer Chad Gracey, guitarist Chad Taylor, Kowalczyk and Dahlheimer started playing covers of the aforementioned acts in the early '80s, winning a local competition in middle school.

BUT IT was the breadth of their own songs that attracted Radioactive Records' president Larry Harrison to sign Live and send them to produce their debut, Heads alumn Jerry Harrison.

Harrison produced "Mental Jewelry," capturing the energy and emotion that Live's music conveys.

There's a lot of different things going on in Live's music, Dahlheimer said.

Not unlike the present, which has a continuing war with Public Image Limited, Big Audio Dynamite II and Blind Melon in a 45-city cross-country tour, four sponsored by MTV, "120 Minutes" and Ryman.

Dahlheimer said there was a bit of awe at first performing with the likes of former Sex Pistols member and FL-leader Johnny Lyndon and Clash member and BAD founder Mick Jones — people who are the most influential people for an earlier generation of rockers.

In a way, the lineup might represent some of the best music giving way to the new. Dahlheimer says he has no notion for a while about what he's doing.

"It could be," he said. "Who knows?"

Live performs along with Public Image Limited, Big Audio Dynamite II and Blind Melon on Sunday, April 12, at the State Theatre in Detroit. Tickets are \$20. For information, call 961-MELT.

IN CONCERT

Monday, April 6

● Paradise Valley Jazz Jam
With Larry Smith at Alvin's, 5744 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. 832-2355.

● The Erj
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747.

Tuesday, April 7

● Poster Children
Blind Pig, 206-85 First, Ann Arbor. 966-4355.

● Jerry Sprague
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747.

● Mike Stern/Bob Berg Band
The Ark, 637-5 S. Main, Ann Arbor. 761-1451.

● Chisel Bros. with Thornella Davis
Alvin's, 5744 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. 832-2355.

● Chris Whitley
With Todd the Wet Sprocket at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Tickets are \$10-\$15 in advance. 961-MELT.

● Erika Bloom
Blind Pig, 206-85 First, Ann Arbor. 966-4355.

● Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747.

● Polish Muslims
Alvin's, 5744 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. 832-2355.

● Thursday, April 9

● Diamond Galas — Judgement Day
St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. 961-MELT.

● Bash & Pop
Featuring Tommy Stinson of the Replacements at Blind Pig, 206-85 First, Ann Arbor. 966-4355.

● Matt/Guitar Murphy
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747.

● Dave Crossland
The Ark, 637-5 S. Main, Ann Arbor. 761-1451.

● Friday, April 10

● Fyke Sauters
With Cowslips at Lili's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. 966-4355.

● Gray Havens
With the Temper at Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Canfield off E. 75th. 365-3670.

● Sun 60
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747.

● Wednesday, April 8

● Erika Bloom
Blind Pig, 206-85 First, Ann Arbor. 966-4355.

Matt/Guitar Murphy

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● Sun 60

Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747.

Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band

Blind Pig, 206-85 First, Ann Arbor. 966-4355.

● RFD Boys

The Ark, 637-5 S. Main, Ann Arbor. 761-1451.

● Johnny Allen

Alvin's, 5744 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. 832-2355.

● Michael Elwood and Beth Geller

La Casa Folk Music Series at Birmingham Unitarian Church, 851 N. Woodward at Loon. Tickets are \$12 at the door and \$10 in advance. 646-4500.

● Robert Parr

Murphy's, 2044 Crooks Road, Rochester Hills. 932-0350.

● Blephemois

Barter's, 11238 Harper, Detroit. 524-4700.

● Saturday, April 11

● Hope Orchestra

With Cylinder Head and the Splitters at Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Canfield off E. 75th. 365-3670.

● See Dick Run

With Opague at Lili's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. 966-4355.

Blephemois

With Country Bole and the Blood Farmers and Chucky Seeds at Paychack's Lounge, 2310 Canfield, off J. Campau, Hamtramck. 972-6031.

● Frank Allison & the Odd Sox

Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747.

● Incubicles

Reuter's Keyboard Lounge, Wayne Road, south of Palmer Road, Westland. 721-1622.

● Dead Bats

Blind Pig, 206-85 First, Ann Arbor. 966-4355.

● Gordon Bok, Ed Trickett and Ann Mayo Muir

The Ark, 637-5 S. Main, Ann Arbor. 761-1451.

● Red C

With Missionary Stew at Alvin's, 5744 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. 832-2355.

● Robert Parr

Murphy's, 2044 Crooks Road, Rochester Hills. 932-0350.

● Sunday, April 12

● PIL, Big Audio Dynamite II

With Live and Blind Melon at The State Theatre. Tickets are \$20. For information, call 961-MELT.

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