

The Death of the
City
The Pianist

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WŁADYSŁAW SZPILMAN

ŚMIERĆ ANIUSIA



WYDAWALNIA WIEDZNIKA W WARSZAWIE

The Death of the City

Władysław Szpilman

Władysław Szpilman

Born 5 December 1911 in Sosnowiec

Polish composer and pianist of Jewish origin

Known as a musical partner of a famous Polish violinist Henryk Szeryng

Forced to move to the Warsaw ghetto with his family since 1940

In the ghetto, he worked as a pianist in various cafes

Almost died during the destruction of Warsaw

Was asked to play piano composition by a Nazi officer W. Hosenfeld

Thanks to him, Szpilman survived the titular „death of the city“

Unsuccessfully tried to save Hosenfeld's life after the war

Died in 2000 after quite a successful career of a composer of popular classical music



The Death of the City

In his memoir book, Szpilman brings an image of the war, the Holocaust, but also to the power of music and mutual understanding when one least expects it

In the Czech Republic, we have got four editions of the book; the last one is from 2018



By 31 August 1939 everyone in Warsaw had been sure for some time that war with the Germans was inevitable. Only incorrigible optimists had still cherished the delusion that Poland's determined stance would deter Hitler at the last moment. Other people's optimism manifested itself, perhaps subconsciously, as opportunism: an inherent belief, in defiance of all logic, that although war was bound to come – that had been decided long ago – its actual outbreak would be delayed, so they could live life to the full a little longer. After all, life was good.

(page 26)

Writing the book was, in a way, an autotherapy for Szpilman to deal with the cruel barbarism he had experienced during the war years.

Some pages of the book relate to a general situation, at other times it is associated with detail, a certain incident.





Chapter Dancing in Chlodna Street is even shown as a grotesque story.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOvoQP_0Mjs



At the same time, Szpilman's literary recording of his experiences and feelings presents the image of the destroyed Warsaw.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vx3aGiurRbQ>



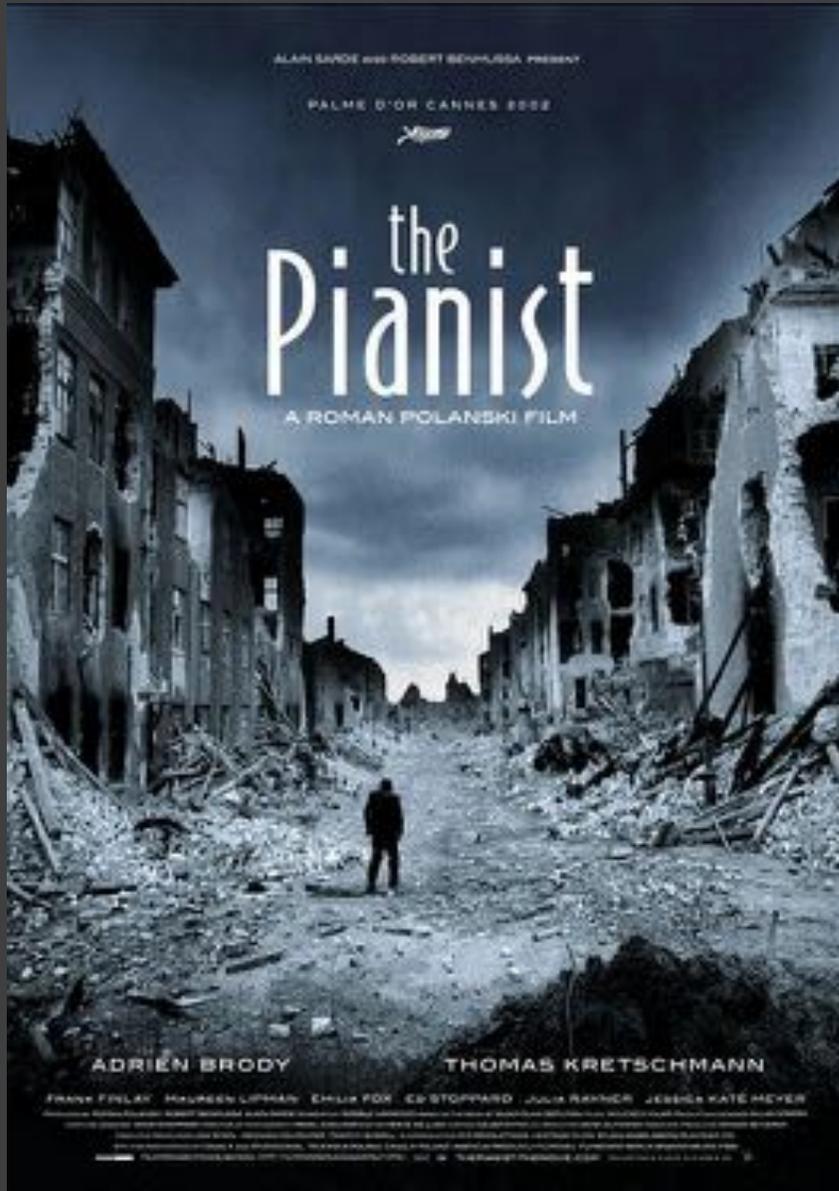
Scraping together the last of our small change, we bought a single cream caramel. Father divided it into six parts with his penknife. That was our last meal together. (page 104)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jnV6fJXZtk>

Szpilman doesn't judge anyone. Even the most brutal actions (such as throwing a disabled Jew from a balcony on the street) are simply described as reality - because it was a reality for him.

The *Pianist's* great strength still lies in the style and formal austerity, and their contrast with the urgency of the plot.

I will now paraphrase Adrian Brody when I say that I hope the book, which shows the pain, dehumanization and consequences of the abominable acts of war, will continue to make a significant contribution to peace.



The Pianist

Roman Polański

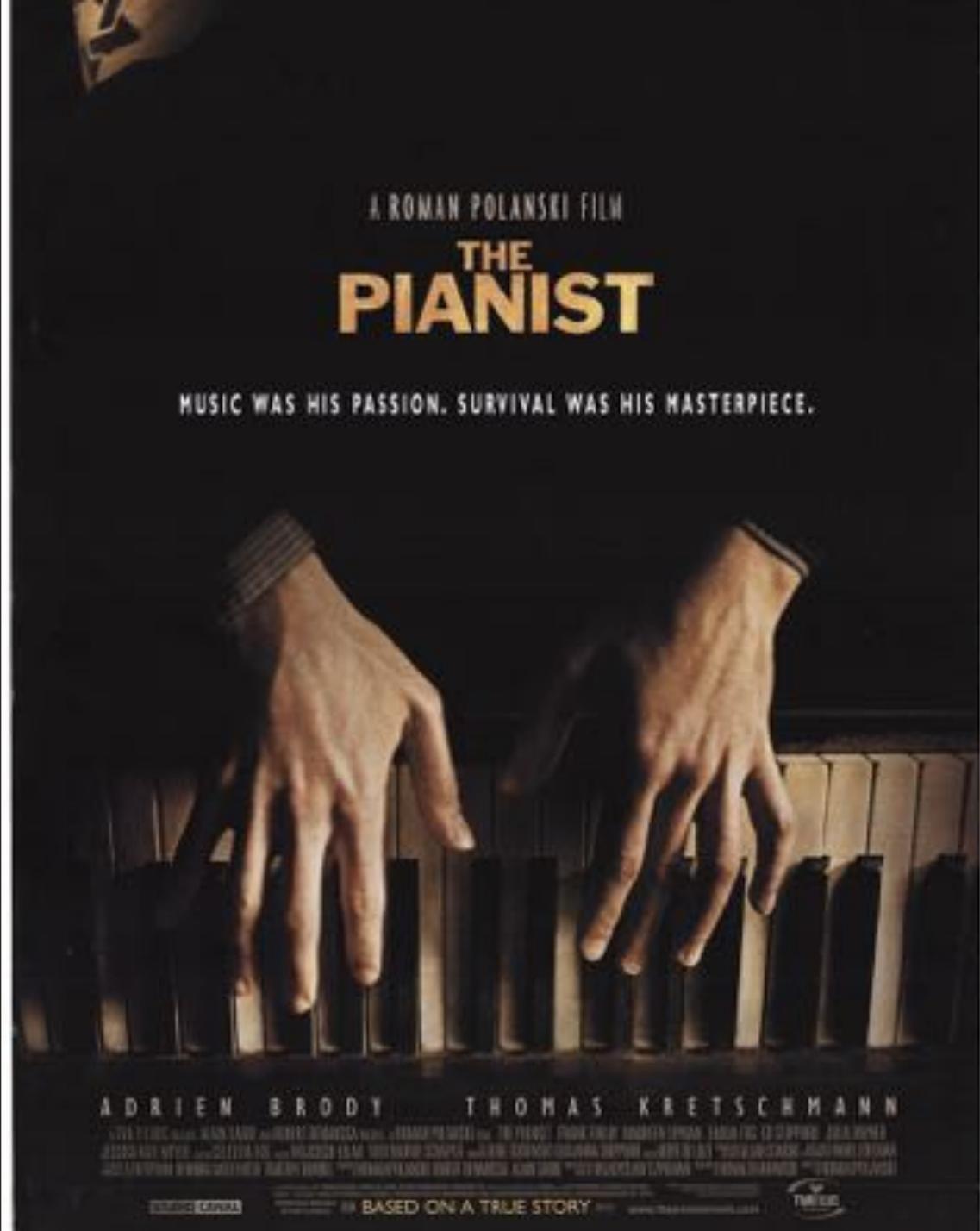


Roman Polański

- Born 18 August 1933 in Paris
- Polish-French film director, writer, actor and producer
- Polish-Jewish parents
- As a child, he was trapped with his family in the Kraków Ghetto
- After his parents were taken away from him, Polański spend his childhood in foster homes under an adopted identity
- His mother died in Auschwitz
- He escaped (at the age of 8) the Ghetto one day before it was demolished completely
- Spielberg wanted him to film Schindler's List
- He won an Oscar for directing The Pianist (among other prizes)

The Pianist (2002)

- Directed by Roman Polański
- Screenplay by Ronald Harwood
- The movie follows the book very closely, but Polański added some of his own memories (and also Dorota doesn't appear in the book)
- The movie won 3 Oscars
- Co-production of France, the UK, Germany and Poland
- It was the first movie to win the French César Award without any French word in it
- The proceeds from the film premiere in the Netherlands were donated to the Anne Frank Foundation

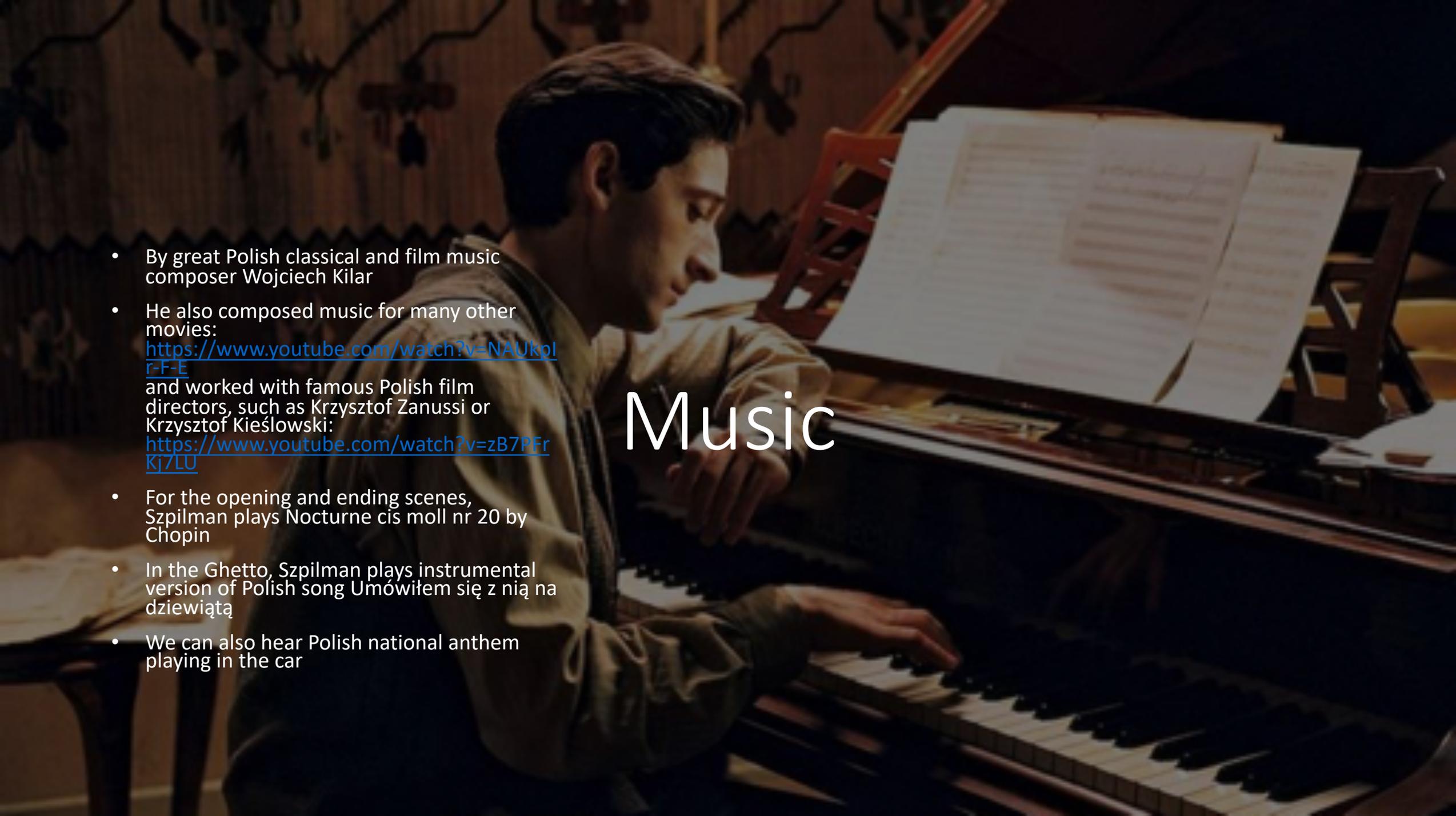


Adrien Brody

- Born 14 April 1973
- His father was Polish-Jewish origin
- He won an Oscar for Best Actor (playing Władysław Szpilman) at the age of 29, which made him the youngest actor to win in that category
- He is a method actor (method acting is a range of acting techniques developed by Konstantin Stanislavski)
- He learned how to play the piano for the role, nevertheless the hands playing the piano in the movie are the hands of Polish pianist Janusz Olejniczek
- To empathize with his role even more, he gave up his apartment, sold his car, didn't watch the TV and broke up with his long time girlfriend
- He also lost 14 kilograms from his former 73 kilograms for the role
- His character is way more sensitive in the movie than in the book (it shows us more of what is he feeling, he even cries a few times)

- By great Polish classical and film music composer Wojciech Kilar
- He also composed music for many other movies:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAUkpI_r-F-E
and worked with famous Polish film directors, such as Krzysztof Zanussi or Krzysztof Kieślowski:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zB7PFrKj7LU>
- For the opening and ending scenes, Szpilman plays Nocturne cis moll nr 20 by Chopin
- In the Ghetto, Szpilman plays instrumental version of Polish song Umówiłem się z nią na dziewiątą
- We can also hear Polish national anthem playing in the car

Music



The Plot

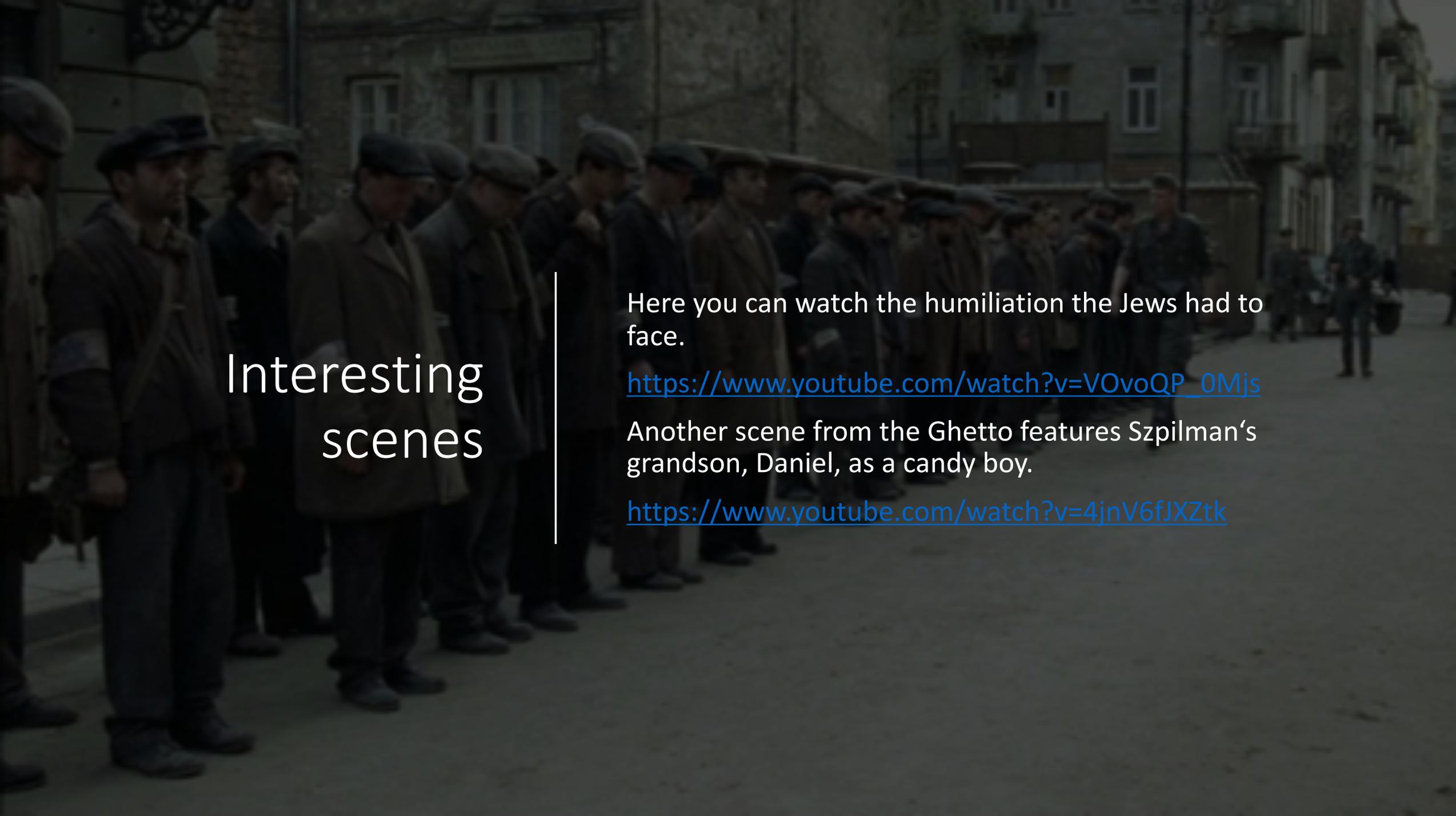
A biographical story about Polish-Jewish pianist and composer Władysław Szpilman, who had survived Holocaust. In September 1939 the Nazis invaded Poland. In that moment, Szpilman was performing for the radio in Warsaw. The story tracks the Szpilman family and how they are forced to leave their homes and live in the overcrowded Warsaw Ghetto instead. In August, the family is transported to Treblinka. But at the Umschlagplatz, Władysław is saved by his friend, who is in the Jewish Ghetto Police. And so he stays in Warsaw. After the Warsaw Uprising, he is left completely alone. A German officer, Wilm Hosenfeld, finds out Władysław is a pianist and saves him by providing him with food and finding him shelter. He survives the Holocaust and returns to the Polish Radio.



Interesting scenes

There are a lot of scenes showing the cruelty against Jewish people. For example in this scene an old man in wheelchair is thrown out of the balcony only because he couldn't stand up.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aD6VpfUIHE>



Interesting scenes

Here you can watch the humiliation the Jews had to face.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOvoQP_0Mjs

Another scene from the Ghetto features Szpilman's grandson, Daniel, as a candy boy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jnV6fJXZtk>



Interesting scenes

One of the most important moments in the movie is when Heller saves Szpilman from the deportation. Following scene is very touching, Władysław is wondering through the destroyed city that was once filled with people and love.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmsRhU8L6iE>

Other facts



- In the movie Polański dubbed one role (Jurek) himself.
- The opening scene of the movie is black and white, but the rest of the movie is coloured. Schindler's List starts with a coloured scene and the rest is black and white.
- The Rubenstein, an older funny man, who was dancing with the kids and who would get cigarettes from the Nazis, was based on a real person. Szpilman said he never knew whether he was only pretending to be a fool or not.
- Szpilman means "musician" in German (der Spielmann). Hosenfeld says it is a good name for a pianist.
- During the shooting of the movie in Cracow, Polański met a man, who had helped his family during the war. Thanks to him, Polański had survived.

A woman with short, wavy, light-colored hair, wearing a grey long-sleeved sweater, is leaning in and talking to a man. The man is wearing a dark tuxedo jacket over a white dress shirt and a white bow tie. He is smiling broadly and looking towards the woman. The background is dimly lit, showing what appears to be a restaurant or event space with wooden paneling and a person in the background holding a tray. The overall mood is warm and appreciative.

Thank you for your attention!