

‘The Song of Names’ Review: A Prodigy, a War and a Mystery

A young violinist goes missing in London in 1951. The eventual answer as to why is powerful.



Luke Doyle and Misha Handley in “The Song of Names.” Credit...Sabrina Lantos/Sony Pictures Classics

By [Ben Kenigsberg](#)

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The Song of Names

Directed by François Girard

Drama

PG-13

1h 53m

[“The Song of Names”](#) begins with a disappearance: In 1951, David Eli Rapoport, a violinist of around 21, is set to make a splash on the London stage. Born in Poland as Dovidl, Rapoport was, as a child, left in the care of a gentile London family that respected his Judaism and nurtured his talent. They prepared him for a life as a virtuoso. What could possibly cause him to skip his debut?

It says much for “The Song of Names” that the eventual answer is powerful enough to be convincing (although it seems less plausible that Dovidl would stay vanished for 35 years). Based on a novel by the [classical music critic Norman Lebrecht](#), and directed by François Girard (“The Red Violin”), the film alternates between two timelines.

[Youtube Video Link for Film](#)

Decades after Dovidl’s disappearance, Martin (Tim Roth), raised alongside him like a brother, encounters a young violinist who has Dovidl’s habit of kissing the rosin before playing. Martin’s pursuit of that clue is intercut with flashbacks to the boys’ upbringing. We learn of their mutual devotion and of their pronounced differences, and of Dovidl’s growing loss of hope for his family’s survival. (Martin is played in succession by Misha Handley and Gerran Howell; Dovidl by Luke Doyle and a superb Jonah Hauer-King, and then, in the Roth time frame, by Clive Owen.)

There is much to admire in the fluidity of Girard’s storytelling, in the music (Ray Chen did the violin solos) and in the complicated questions raised about social obligations. Still, the movie never quite justifies the contrivance of its puzzle-box construction. Parlaying this material into an arty whodunit cheapens the real history invoked.

The Song of Names

Rated PG-13. Disturbing wartime scenes. Running time: 1 hour 53 minutes.

Director

François Girard

Writer

Jeffrey Caine

Stars

Jonah Hauer-King, Clive Owen, Tim Roth, Eddie Izzard, Catherine McCormack

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