

MUSIC - ROOTS

GREG QUILL, Toronto Star

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SMALL TOWN, BIG RANGE

Yael Wand embraces multiple musical genres on new disc composed in B.C. interior

Though she grew up in Vancouver, Israeli-born songwriter Yael Wand found her muse in a couple of small and remote communities in the B.C. interior – the tiny mining town of Wells where, Wand said in a recent interview, she "followed a guy and fell in love with the place ... the quiet, the closeness," and more recently, Smithers, population 6,000, a good four-hour drive west of Prince George and 14 hours from B.C.'s Big Smoke.

"I find it easier to concentrate there on music, and less expensive to live," explained the singer and composer whose sophomore CD, *At Your Door*, has won rave reviews and prompted demands for live appearances across the country. Wand was in Montreal when we spoke, and performs several dates in and around Toronto this week, such as the Free Times Café tonight, The Moonshine Café in Oakville on Saturday, and The Cornerstone in Guelph on Sunday.

"I don't have to rely as much on part-time jobs, and there are fewer distractions. I tend to lose myself in the details of city life ... there's always too much going on."

If she sometimes feels outside the industrial loop so far from Vancouver, Wand's preference for isolation hasn't narrowed her perceptions of the larger world nor restricted her extraordinarily catholic musical tastes. *At Your Door* embraces half a dozen genres, from Appalachian-style balladry to tippy 1930s jazz to Middle Eastern rhythms and melodies, and her lyrics deal with the deeply personal – tales of obsessive love and lost connections – and the quirky and whimsical, as well as quite lucid and bracing political commentary.

"Part of the reason I love Smithers is that for 25 years it has been home to the Midsummer Music Festival, and because of that, the people there are very supportive, very knowledgeable," Wand said.

"And there's music everywhere. I'm notoriously bad at sticking to one genre, and I've really been trying hard to get away from songs about me. So I sign up for music camps and workshops to learn the basics of different kinds of music, then I write a song in one style or another, basically as a learning experience. Inevitably they end up in my repertoire."