

Room 710: Hope, heart, and homes in hotels

The Jerusalem Theatre displays photos of senior evacuees from the war

By CORINNE BAUM

How can you live your life normally without your normal surroundings?

That was the central question of *Room 710: Far from Home, Close to the Heart*, a photography exhibition that opened on August 1 at the Sherover Foyer of the Jerusalem Theatre, showcasing the temporary homes of senior evacuees from the North and South.

The exhibition was produced by the Shefer Association, supported by the Welfare and Social Security Ministry and the Jerusalem Municipality's Senior Citizens Administration.

The senior citizens have been living in the central region for almost 10 months after being forced to leave their homes in places like Shlomi and Kiryat Shmona by the Welfare Ministry's Senior Citizens Administration. Currently, with evacuated families having been moved into apartments, many of the evacuees who still reside in the hotels are in their sixties and older, CEO of the Shefer Organization Ayala Wohl, said.

To raise awareness of their plight, the organization created the exhibit which will be displayed at the Jerusalem Theatre until the end of the month.

"We wanted people to know more about the situation of those who have been evacuated from their homes, especially the elderly," Wohl said, adding that such a change in one's living situation is challenging for anyone, particularly for those more advanced in age, who may be very used to their surroundings.

"We wanted to show, first of all, that it is hard, but also that they have a lot of strength and the ability to deal with the situation. They know how to handle hard situations," Wohl said.

Photographer Refael Shachari and writer Hilit Krause Israel went to the apartments and hotel rooms of the senior citizens to document them in their new spaces with items from home that connect them to the lives from which they were uprooted.

"Each time I entered their rooms, I felt awe, as these spaces are their homes, the most intimate and personal places," said Shachari, in



ILANA BINYAMINA knits in her hotel room in Jerusalem. (Refael Shachari)



Yafa Yechezkeli prays in her temporary housing. (Refael Shachari)

a statement released by the Shefer organization.

"The meetings were intense, but I felt they were letting me into their hearts and homes, making the photography authentic – and relaxing me. This allowed me to view each person – and the [larger community of] tens of thousands of evacuees – with greater sensitivity, realizing that each one of them needs a home."

Every photo conjures up a clear picture of who each person is and of what they have left behind. Some brought

petunias to brighten up their spaces. Others brought prayer accoutrements: *tefillin*, *tallit*, and *siddurim*. Some had well-loved stuffed animals from their grandchildren scattered about their rooms.

It can be extremely isolating to be far from one's home for an undetermined period of time, especially for an age group that is often more prone to loneliness. Along with their partners in the ministry and the municipality, the Shefer Association has been working to provide the senior evacuees with a sense

of belonging.

At every hotel, they are four hours of planned activities every day. On Monday, an event was held to showcase the exhibition, designed to get the evacuees involved with the community and with culture, helping them to maintain their independence.

"I'm sad because it's been such a long time [since they've been home]. But on the other hand, I think, ok, we've done something for these people," said Yariv Man, deputy general of the

Administration for Seniors in the Welfare Ministry.

"They're not just people who come to the hotel and then go [home]. They're part of the community, and we wish that they will go back to their homes as soon as possible," he added.

Throughout the event on Monday – a socializing and bonding activity for the evacuees and their families – these seniors repeatedly proved just how involved with the community and culture they were. They posed for pictures with Welfare Minister

Yaakov Margi and listened to his speech afterward. The Lady Stern Hotel women's choir opened the event. They spoke with other attendees and showed their pictures to proud family members.

Playback group Or Ha'or performed an improvised show using stories from the audience about the bits and pieces the evacuees left behind.

The exhibit, paired with the event, was witness to the vast strength and capacity of the subjects.

"It gives a message of hope that even in hard times, we found ways to cope," said Wohl about the exhibit. "Even in a small hotel room, a person can bring flowers and bring hope. Also, the power of the people together is very helpful."

Maintaining a sense of normalcy after October 7 is difficult for any citizen of Israel, let alone for older citizens forced to abandon their normal lives. Their resilience in the face of the war is exemplary.

Room 710: Far from Home will be exhibited in the Sherover Theatre Foyer at the Jerusalem Theatre complex, through August 31.

Makers of 'Alien: Romulus' defend AI-resurrected Ian Holm

'We did it all with a lot of respect'

By CARLOS AGUILAR

A familiar face appears unexpectedly a third of the way into *Alien: Romulus*, the gruesome new interquel in the *Alien* franchise, currently in theaters.

The inclusion of a new "synthetic" (a humanoid android) bearing the likeness of the late actor Ian Holm has already sparked impassioned online reactions. Social media users have questioned the ethics of the multiple-scene cameo, with some calling it "digital necromancy." Holm, who acted in *Chariots of Fire*, *Brazil*, and *The Sweet Hereafter*, died in 2020 at age 88.

In Ridley Scott's original 1979 sci-fi-horror classic *Alien*, Holm played Ash, a secretly synthetic crew member with ulterior motives. And now his face and voice have been resurrected as a new character named Rook, also synthetic. While *Alien: Romulus* director Fele Alvarez admits to using AI to create the illusion, he hopes viewers will consider the film's larger intent.

"We were not trying to do what can't be done, which is to reproduce that person's talent as an actor because this is another character," Alvarez, 46, tells *The Los Angeles Times*. "The only thing they have in common is the likeness."

Among many other callbacks to both *Alien* and James Cameron's 1986 sequel *Aliens*, the appearance of a half-destroyed



IAN HOLM, RIGHT, with Sigourney Weaver and Yaphet Kotto in the original 1979 'Alien.' Holm's likeness has been re-created via AI and animatronics for the new 'Alien: Romulus.' (20th Century Fox/Album/Zuma Press/TNS)

android torso interacting with passengers was always part of the new narrative – even before deciding what it would look like.

"We knew we were going to create an animatronic," says Alvarez, using the term for an on-set lifelike robot, "and that later we were going to do CGI enhancements in the mouth and in the eyes depending on the shots. "Then the question arose, 'What face does it have? Who is it?'"

Alvarez says his team considered the whole range of synthetics in *Alien* films over the years: Lance Henriksen appeared as Bishop in *Aliens* and then again in David Fincher's 1992 *Aliens 3* – in the latter as a legless torso on a table like Rook – while Michael Fass-

bender played David 8 in Scott's *Prometheus* and Walter One in *Alien: Covenant*.

"The only one who hadn't reappeared and who we found fascinating was Ian Holm," Alvarez says.

Alvarez reached out to Holm's widow, Sophie de Stempel, to explain the idea and to ask for her thoughts. Then he discussed it with Scott, who had remained acquainted with Holm throughout his life. Both parties were enthusiastic about the proposition for *Romulus*.

"In the last 10 years after *The Hobbit*, Ian Holm felt like Hollywood had turned its back on him and his widow felt he would have loved to be a part of this," says Alvarez. "He loved this character in particular."

Scott sees the presence of

Rook as a way for Alvarez to "dip into some of the artifacts from the very first film," he says.

"Ian Holm suddenly appearing as a company on-board robot – that's a bit of an old-fashioned word there – was a great idea," says Scott, 86. "That's how ideas work. Grand ideas evolve. The next step is *Blade Runner*, where you get Roy Batty as an evolved replicant, a human who's not human, but actually in essence, in old terminology, a robot."

Back in the first *Alien*, Scott recalls, the shocking revelation that Holm's character Ash was not human was pivotal to the story, since they had to be prudent with how much of the creature they showed. "We were running out of big, quick scares and glimpses of an alien because in those days I didn't have these digital effects," he says.

For the production of *Romulus*, Rook was designed as an animatronic in the image of Holm, with facial movements that were the work of off-camera human maneuvering.

"It was 80 to 90% done by the puppeteers depending on the shot," says Alvarez, describing the subsequent CGI enhancements in post-production as eye work ("so that the animatronic had a little more life") and in the mouth to make the lip-sync better.

He also had British actor Daniel Betts on set in Budapest to record the facial capture with

the cast. During filming, the lines were read in real-time using the animatronic. Betts' voice was then transformed to sound more like Holm's using generative AI and computer modeling.

"We're not bringing someone back to life and saying, 'Ian would have done it that way,'" says the director. "He would have obviously done it differently. We had an actor who was on the set, who worked on the dialogue, who worked with the actors. It's not like we skipped hiring an actor."

Alvarez doesn't think it's feasible for AI to replace actors in the near future. His choice to use those tools to create Rook, he says, was solely specific to this film and this franchise.

"It's so much more expensive to do it the way we did it – it's much cheaper to just hire an actor," Alvarez explains in his defense. "Doing it this way requires a team of so many people and so many parts to get it done that it's never going to be really convenient."

Alvarez maintains that Rook is a character with a personality distinct from that of Ash, and that his motivation for using Holm's likeness and voice was a genuine desire to honor his place in the franchise's history.

"We did it all with a lot of respect and always with the authorization of his family, his children, and his widow, who said, 'We would love to see his likeness again,'" Alvarez says. (Los Angeles Times/TNS)



ONE OF the offerings in the upcoming Jerusalem International Solo Dance Festival. (Vojtech Brtnicky)

Dancing solo

By ORI J. LENKINSKI

For many years, international festivals were staples on the Israeli cultural calendar. However, the past four years have brought disruption after disruption to these events. Local presenters have shuffled schedules and programs to accommodate current events, and local audiences have learned to rely on Israel-based artists for live performances.

Perhaps in the most difficult period to date, Jerusalem-based choreographer and director Miriam Engel insisted on holding the third annual Jerusalem International Solo Dance Festival here next month. For four days, tens of foreign artists – hailing from Italy, Spain, the United States, Germany, Greece,

Slovakia, Hungary, Argentina, Holland, France, and Romania – will perform solos and duets in outdoor venues and the halls of the Jerusalem Theatre. In addition, JISDF will offer workshops, artist's talks, film screenings, and a residency program for both foreign and local artists.

The festival will culminate with an original production by the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, with pianist and composer Nizar Elkhatir, international conductor Gisele Ben-Dor, and soprano Rania Ateek. The concert will include performances by the solo dancers as well as duets.

The Jerusalem International Solo Dance Festival will be held September 11-14. For more information, visit www.jisdf.co.il.

A real-life horror show about keeping chimpanzees as pets

TV REVIEW

By NINA METZ

In the 1997 movie *Buddy*, Rene Russo plays a wealthy, eccentric collector of wild animals. Hoarder might be a more fitting description. Chimpanzees are among the animals in her possession. Alan Cumming co-stars and he's interviewed in the deeply unsettling four-part HBO docuseries *Chimp Crazy* talking about his experiences on the film, which he says is "really about the fact that you can't tame wild things, you have to let them be themselves. You have to let

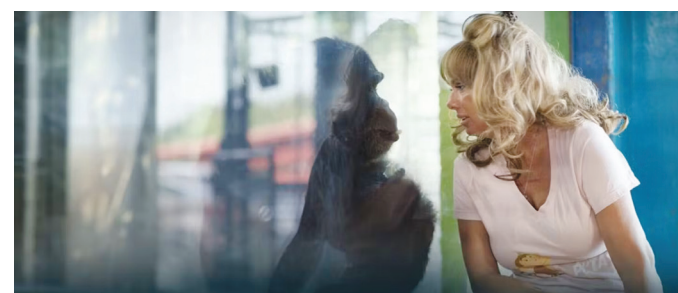
them go." Of course, the irony is that in order to capture that on screen, the animals used in the film weren't allowed to be themselves at all, but some unnatural version of what Hollywood – and their trainers – wanted.

Director Eric Goode previously made *Tiger King* for Netflix, and with this project he offers another excoriating look at the exotic animal industry, specifically private chimpanzee ownership in the United States. The series' primary focus is a woman named Tonia Haddix. At the outset, she is working at a deceptively official-sound-

ing facility called the Missouri Primate Foundation, where a chimp named Tonka – who appeared alongside Cumming in *Buddy* – is now middle-aged and kept alone in a cage.

"My understanding of what happened to Tonka after his Hollywood career ended was that he retired to Palm Springs," says Cumming, perhaps naively. "That's what I was told."

Instead, Tonka is housed in that Missouri location, which is owned by a longtime chimp breeder named Connie Casie. According to the documentary, she is responsible for three-quarters of the cap-



TONIA HADDIX and Tonka in HBO's docuseries 'Chimp Crazy.' (HBO/TNS)

ture-bred chimps in the US. She does not want to talk on camera, but Haddix is eager to talk in her place.

Haddix has an ostentatious

appearance and calls herself the "Dolly Parton of chimps." She's an accommodating and talkative documentary subject, but also something of a per-

formance artist who will go to great lengths to maintain the fiction that there's nothing wrong with keeping chimps as pets.

I found that the docuseries stayed with me for days after I watched it, and it has affected how I think about all our interactions with animals, both domesticated and wild. These relationships can turn sour when humans force animals into situations that suit us but not them, and expect unconditional love, or something like it, when the reality is far more complicated. (Chicago Tribune/TNS)

Update

Shlomo Mizrahi, a Jimi Hendrix tribute guitarist who was slated to perform at Thursday night's Woodstock festival at the Kfar Shaul health and cultural hub in the Har Nof neighborhood of Jerusalem, has postponed his set.

There will still be a full slate of performers. For more info contact Tracey 054-810-8918.