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This combination of pictures shows Jordanian make-up artist Alaa Bliha, 27, speaking to a journalist (left), after completing her make-up to resemble Queen Elizabeth II, in the basement apartment where she lives with her mother and young brother in the capital Amman.



Alaa Bliha uses a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II saved on her mobile telephone to work on her imitation make-up. — AFP photos

JORDAN MAKE-UP ARTIST LIGHTENS LOCKDOWN WITH CELEBRITY IMPRESSIONS

A young Jordanian make-up artist has beaten the lockdown blues and shot to online fame with videos of herself imitating famous figures from across the Arab world and beyond. From Donald Trump and Queen Elizabeth II to Egyptian superstars like singer Umm Kulthum and actor Adel Imam, her characters have made Alaa Bliha a star in her own right with tens of thousands of social media followers. The 27-year-old says she started making the clips to stave off depression, after losing her job as a theatre make-up artist in Bahrain and returning to a grim coronavirus lockdown in Jordan.

Based in a basement apartment in northern Amman where she lives with her mother and young brother, she has transformed herself into Angelina Jolie, Michael Jackson and Cristiano Ronaldo. "Everyone was bored and under psychological pressure when the pandemic began," she said. "So I decided... to bring people a bit of happiness." Months later, she has some 30,000 followers on



Alaa Bliha applies coloured eye lenses to complete her imitation make-up to resemble Queen Elizabeth II.

TikTok and another 24,000 on Instagram, where comments on her videos are full of praise. "I was surprised by people's positive reactions and encouragement," Bliha said.

Her imitations of Lebanese singer Fairuz and Egyptian mega-star Umm Kulthum have been big hits, while her

sketch of Emirati singer Abdullah Bilkhair has been watched more than half a million times on TikTok. But while they may be light-hearted, each video takes hours of preparation. Bliha, a visual arts graduate, studies her chosen personalities and spends up to seven hours in front of the mirror applying cosmetics, wigs, accessories and even coloured contact lenses. Then she films herself lip-syncing over interviews or songs by her characters. "I spend entire days watching videos to understand their behavior, their movements, the way they talk, dress, walk or smoke," she said. "It takes me out of myself and I become another person," she added. "It's a really strange feeling."

'Not all funny'

Bliha's clips provided a distraction from Jordan's tough three-month lockdown last year, which was followed by months of curfew to stem Covid-19. Coronavirus has infected at least 330,000 people in Jordan and killed more than 4,300. Soon, she plans to



Alaa Bliha poses for a picture after completing her make-up to resemble Queen Elizabeth II.

poke fun at Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and leading US senator Bernie Sanders. But some videos also have a serious note. On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in November, she posted disturbing images of herself made up with bruises.

"We need to shine a spotlight on these issues and take a stand," she said. "Not everything in life is funny or entertaining. There are women who face violence and oppression, and this needs to stop." She says the pandemic has given some people time to discover themselves and develop new skills. And since she arrived home jobless, her videos have won her two offers of work at TV stations. Jordanian actor and screenwriter Omar Zorba has also hired her to work on a sitcom, to be aired during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. "During the lockdown, I saw on Instagram that (Bliha) had done an amazing impression of me," he said. "She's able to totally change actors' faces, meaning they can play two different roles in the same series," he added. "Honestly, I haven't seen another make-up artist in Jordan with this level of creativity and craftsmanship." — AFP



Alaa Bliha draws outlines on her face before she starts working on her imitation make-up.

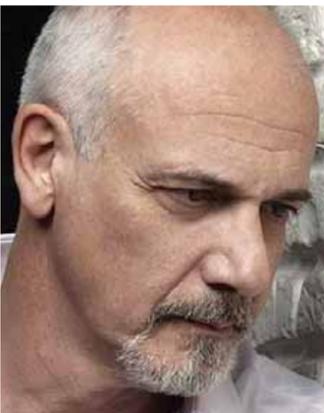


Alaa Bliha works on her imitation make-up to resemble Queen Elizabeth II.



Star Greek actors lose jobs as #MeToo claims grow

Three Greek theatre and television stars have lost lucrative jobs, the latest on Monday, as a chorus of sex harassment, abuse and bullying allegations grows in a #MeToo awakening in Greece. Giorgos Kimoulis, regarded as one of Greece's finest actors, has been removed from this year's Athens and Epidaurus Festival, the country's premier arts festival said Monday after a flurry of bullying claims from actresses. The festival said there were "public complaints against Mr Kimoulis from colleagues (alleging



Giorgos Kimoulis

insults to their personality."

Also Monday, state TV ERT said it axed an actor without identifying him, but Greek news reports identified him as one of the country's top comedians, Petros Filippidis. Mega TV last week said it had a leaked letter to the Greek actors' guild from three actresses, accusing Filippidis of lewd behavior. The actor was briefly hospitalized last week, after issuing a statement through his lawyer calling on media to refrain from mentioning his name in relation to the story. "You've known me for 35 years," the statement said. "Please respect my wife and child, the truth will not come out through trial by television."

Another prominent thespian, National Theatre artistic director Dimitris Lignadis, on Sunday resigned from his post, citing a "toxic climate of rumours, innuendo and leaks." All three artists deny the accusations. Few of the complaints can be prosecuted as they occurred decades earlier. The Greek actors' guild has said it has received over a thousand complaints from alleged victims in recent days. More than three years after the #MeToo movement surfaced in the United States, the code of silence in Greece was broken by a two-time Olympic sailing medallist, Sofia Bekatorou.

Bekatorou in December said she was 21 when she was subjected to "sexual harassment and abuse" by a senior federation member in his hotel room, shortly after trials for the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Her comments have encouraged other women athletes, students, journalists and actresses to step forward. Last week, the leftwing MeRA25 party suspended one of Greece's best-known composers as a member after a singer alleged he tried to have sex with her in his home when she was 14. — AFP

'Cyrano' and 'Tin Drum' screenwriter **Carriere** dies at 89

Legendary French screenwriter Jean-Claude Carriere, who penned some of the most memorable movies of the last half century including "The Tin Drum" and "Cyrano de Bergerac", has died at the age of 89, his daughter told AFP. Carriere, best known for his work with Luis Bunuel and Milos Forman, died in his sleep late Monday at his home in Paris, said Kiara Carriere. A prolific writer whose career spanned six decades, Carriere created a range of memorable and provocative scenes, including tying a fresh-faced Catherine Deneuve naked to a tree.

"Belle de Jour" was one of the fruits of his 19-year collaboration with subversive Spanish enfant terrible Luis Bunuel, famous for shocking audiences. Carriere and Bunuel won an Oscar in 1972 for "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoise", adding to Carriere's best short film Oscar in 1963. His work ranged across cultures, religions and historical periods, from "Cyrano de Bergerac" (1990), for which Gerard Depardieu gave one of the performances of his career, to the adaptation of Milan Kundera's "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" (1988) with Daniel Day-Lewis.

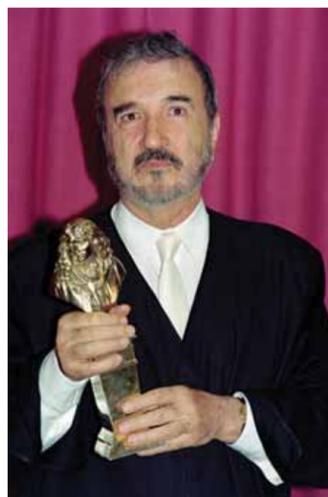
Carriere's 1979 adaption of Gunter Grass's novel "The Tin Drum", directed by Volker Schlöndorff, won another Oscar as well as the Palme d'Or at Cannes. He was also nominated for another Oscar for his "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" screenplay together with director Philip Kaufman and won a French Cesar in 1983 for best original screenplay for "The Return of Martin

Guerre", starring Depardieu.

'The boss'

In 2014 Carriere was awarded an honorary Oscar for his life's work of around 80 screenplays but also essays, fiction, translations and interviews. And one of his final films, "At Eternity's Gate" about the artist Vincent Van Gogh's final months, was nominated for another, with Carriere determined to prove that the painter did not kill himself. He also enjoyed frequent appearances in front of the camera, with roles opposite Juliette Greco, Brigitte Bardot and Jeanne Moreau.

The Cannes film festival's former



president Gilles Jacob led the tributes, saying that Carriere was France's finest screenwriter ever. "You were the boss," he added. Born on September 17, 1931 into a family of winegrowers, his parents moved near Paris in 1945 to open a cafe. A star pupil, Carriere went on to study at one of France's elite Grandes Ecoles. By 26, he had written his first novel. He said he enjoyed being at the service of a director and slipping into their way of thinking. "I have no ego," he once said.

"Meetings, friendships and life teachers" marked his life, from the Dalai Lama to the great surrealist Bunuel. One key encounter was with acclaimed British director Peter Brook with whom he adapted the Sanskrit Hindu epic the "Mahabharata" for the stage and screen. When its play version was performed at the Avignon festival in 1985, it ran for nine hours to an astonished crowd. "Watching it, forgetting I was the one who wrote it, was one of the great joys in my life," Carriere said. Despite the coronavirus restrictions, a tribute will be held for him in Paris, his daughter said, and he will be buried in his native village in Colombieres-sur-Orb in southern France. — AFP

In this file photo French writer Jean-Claude Carriere poses after receiving the Best Adaptation of a Foreign Play for "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare during the 5th Moliere theatre award ceremony at the Champs-Elysees theater in Paris. — AFP