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A woman looks at a mural of a health worker with wings holding a globe on International Nurses Day in Melbourne yesterday. As frontline hospital staff are constantly facing the risks from the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak, the world is marking International Nurses Day, celebrated around the world every May 12, the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth.—AFP

Safety screening: Czech cinemas open with new virus rules in place

After two months under a coronavirus lockdown in the Czech Republic, 16-year-old Tomas Fohler was eager to go to the movies — a novel outing that now comes with new rules in a world gripped by a pandemic. “We wanted to see what it’s like just to go and see a film with my friends again,” the teen told AFP before settling in for a Czech film with two pals in Prague. “We’ll sit further from each other, in a single row, and we’ll probably shout at each other,” he joked, wearing a face mask which is now required in all public places.



People wearing face masks watch a film in a cinema on Monday in Prague.—AFP

Live classical music to return in London... at a distance

One of Britain’s leading classical music venues yesterday announced a program of live concerts as the country eases out of lockdown measures, featuring virtuosos such as pianist Mitsuko Uchida. A total of 20 concerts lasting up to an hour each will be broadcast live on BBC radio and on livestream around the world from June 1 from the Wigmore Hall in central London. But the venue stressed that strict social distancing measures would remain in place, as it partially re-opens for the first time since the lockdown began in late March. Some of the world’s leading musicians will perform solo recitals or as a duo without an audience, and with only a maximum of four staff, including a sound engineer, present.

New government guidelines published on Monday envisage “cultural and sporting events to take place behind closed-doors for broadcast” from next month. But they stipulate they can only take place without the risk of “large-scale social contact”. Wigmore Hall director John Gilhooly said the concerts would take place “under the strictest possible conditions”. “The health and safety of our staff and the musicians will always be Wigmore Hall’s foremost concern,” he added in a statement. Music venues, theatres, museums and art galleries across Britain were all ordered to shut, and annual festivals were cancelled, as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

Last month the Creative Industries Federation representative body warned the government Britain could become a “cultural wasteland” without urgent financial help. More support was needed for self-employed actors and performers unable to access government rescue plans, and venues at risk from a lack of revenue, it said. It cited research that one in seven organizations had reserves to last until the end of April, and only half had resources to last beyond June. BBC Radio 3 is the corporation’s classical music channel. Its controller, Alan Davey, said the absence of live music had affected musicians unable to play and audiences at home. “It’s a great joy to restore this service to the nation whilst also ensuring maximum health and safety,” he added. The first concert on June 1 will be a piano recital by Stephen Hough. Other performers include pianist Mitsuko Uchida, and opera singers Iestyn Davies and Mark Padmore.—AFP

The theatre — which requires all guests to sit two meters (over six feet) apart — is among the first to open in Europe, where strict lockdowns have hemmed in huge swathes of the population for weeks on end. The Czech Republic is joining several countries in easing some restrictions, allowing citizens out of the house for simple activities that now feel unfamiliar. But many businesses, the cinema included, did not receive a rush of customers, even with new safety measures now on the menu. Fohler and his friends were the only three ticket holders at Monday morning’s screening, and all seats remained empty for the next two showings.

Other theatres in the country opted to keep their doors shut, waiting instead for other lockdown restrictions to be lifted. The Czech Republic is not the first country to allow moviegoers back to the big screen. Some cinemas have opened in Norway, also asking guests to respect social distancing measures, with several theatres limiting the number of guests to 50.

‘Strange to be back’

Museums, galleries, theatres and cinemas were among the first businesses to shut down in Europe as governments rolled out strict lockdown measures to stave off the fast-spreading coronavirus outbreak. The Czech Republic was spared the worst of the outbreak endured by hotspots such as Italy and Spain, but took similarly drastic steps to stem the virus’ spread. It is now emerging from its months-old lockdown, and along with cinemas, pubs, cafes and restaurants are allowed to serve customers again, but only on open-air terraces.

Shopping malls were also open for business, though for some it was odd to be back on the job. “I was really looking forward to the reopening, but it also feels a bit strange to be at work after such a long time,” Ivana Madarova, working in a mall, told AFP. “I spent the free time with my boyfriend and family, we had a good time doing barbecues and being in the garden,” she added, looking out into the empty aisle. And after weeks of closures, steep discounts did little to lure customers at her shop. “We expected a shopping boom but it’s been pretty quiet so far,” she told AFP. Business, however, was brisk in a nearby barber shop.

“We’re absolutely full today until 8:00 pm and bookings keep coming,” receptionist Karolina Mazakova said to the hum of clippers and clicking of scissors. Church services and events with up to 100 people, including sports training sessions, are also allowed again, while elementary and secondary schools opened partially. The Czech Republic registered over 8,000 cases of the virus, including 281 deaths as of Monday. A “collective immunity study” testing the presence of COVID-19 antibodies in people without symptoms released last week showed a low incidence of the disease. Some credit the success to the mandatory face mask rule, which will be eased as of May 25, when they will only be required in shops, offices and on public transport. Restaurants, hotels, zoos and tattoo shops will also open then.—AFP

‘Assassin’s Creed’ stars as Xbox teases new games

Microsoft on Thursday offered the first glimpse at games for its new Xbox console coming this year, playing to fans hungry for escape in a time of pandemic. The latest addition to Ubisoft’s blockbuster “Assassin’s Creed” franchise called “Valhalla” was the star attraction during a streamed event featuring game studios from around the world. The event highlighted Microsoft’s efforts to ramp up its gaming with a new-generation console and popular game titles to help it compete with Sony’s leading PlayStation devices.

The new Xbox X console is expected later this year, although Microsoft has not yet announced a release date. Sony is also to release its PlayStation 5 model later this year. PlayStation 4 consoles have trounced Xbox One in sales since the rival gaming systems launched in late 2013. The Microsoft streamed event included a guest appearance by Super Bowl-winning Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes. An animated version of Mahomes also took the field in game-play from a coming EA Madden sports franchise US football title.

Home anime: Ghibli producer offers Totoro lesson online

Time on your hands and a love of anime? A producer from Japan’s Studio Ghibli is offering an online tutorial for drawing one of its most beloved characters: Totoro. Toshio Suzuki, former president of the Tokyo-based studio, contributed the video to a website intended to support children stuck at home during the coronavirus outbreak. “Hi everyone, I will teach you how to draw Totoro,” a grinning Suzuki says in the brief lesson, first painting the outline of the rotund character, which resembles something between a cat, an owl and a raccoon.

Using an ink brush, he advises that “the most important” element of illustrating the creature is to draw its rounded eyes set far apart. “This is something you can do at home. Everyone, please draw pictures,” Suzuki says. The lovable Totoro is the star of Studio Ghibli’s popular film “My Neighbour Totoro”, which tells the story of two sisters and their friendships with forest creatures. It was released in 1988 and became an instant classic, remaining popular both in Japan and abroad, even hitting Chinese cinemas for the first time in 2018. Suzuki produced the movie, along with other major Studio Ghibli animations such as “Kiki’s Delivery Service,” “Princess Mononoke” and “Spirited Away.”

Japan has seen a smaller coronavirus outbreak than parts of Europe or the United States, but many schools have been closed since late February and the country is currently under a state of emergency. Tokyo’s popular Ghibli Museum, featuring the works of the studio’s



In this frame grab taken from undated handout video footage released by the Nagoya City Education Board Education Centre yesterday, Studio Ghibli producer Toshio Suzuki gives an online tutorial for drawing one of its characters ‘Totoro’ at his home in Tokyo.—AFP

Oscar-winning animator Hayao Miyazaki, is among the public and private facilities that have been closed for months. Suzuki’s video is on a website set up by his hometown of Nagoya to support children stuck at home, and also features video messages from celebrities and famed athletes linked to the city.—AFP



This handout photo obtained May 11, 2020 courtesy of Julien’s Auctions, shows the guitar played by Kurt Cobain during Nirvana’s acclaimed MTV Unplugged in New York performance.—AFP

Cobain ‘Unplugged’ guitar up for auction starting at \$1 million

Decades after grunge’s reluctant poster boy took his own life, Kurt Cobain’s guitar played during his legendary MTV Unplugged performance is hitting the auction block at a starting estimate of \$1 million. The retro acoustic-electric 1959 Martin D-18E Cobain strummed for Nirvana’s career-defining performance in New York — just five months before his shock death at age 27 — will be open to the highest bidder the weekend of June 19th in Beverly Hills and online via Julien’s Auctions. Considering the starting estimate of \$1 million for Cobain’s guitar, it will likely go for more than double that of a guitar that played a key role in Bob Dylan’s artistic evolution from folk to rock, which in 2018 fetched just under half a million.

Nirvana’s acoustic performance during the taping for the popular MTV Unplugged series on November 18th, 1993 became what is considered one of history’s greatest live albums. It included renditions of Nirvana’s hits “About A Girl” and “Come As You Are” along with covers including David Bowie’s “The Man Who Sold The World.” The guitar will be on display in the front window of London’s Piccadilly Circus Hard Rock Cafe starting May 15 until May 31. Other Cobain memorabilia going up for sale includes a black custom-made and smashed Fender Stratocaster guitar played during 1994’s In Utero Tour — starting at \$60,000 — and a metallic silver lame long sleeve button-down shirt the artist wore in the 1993 “Heart-shaped Box” music video, starting at \$10,000. In October 2019 Cobain’s iconic cigarette-singed cardigan worn during the “Unplugged” performance sold for \$334,000. And a paper plate Cobain had eaten pizza off of — and then written a Nirvana set list on for a performance at Washington’s intimate 9:30 club — that same year went for \$22,400.—AFP

‘Seinfeld’ star Jerry Stiller dies at 92: Actor son Ben

Veteran actor and comedian Jerry Stiller, who found fame on Broadway and later in the smash US show “Seinfeld” has died from natural causes aged 92, his son, the Hollywood star Ben Stiller, said Monday. Stiller Sr and his wife Anne Meara starred on the stage and TV in the 1960s, writing and performing comedy sketches and routines together. He later played George Costanza’s short-tempered father Frank on the smash TV show “Seinfeld,” for which he won the Funniest Male Guest Appearance in a TV Series at the American Comedy Awards in 1998.

He was nominated for an Emmy award the year before for the same role. He also played Leah Remini’s father in the sitcom “The King of Queens” and starred alongside Ben in the “Zoolander” films. “I’m sad to say that my father, Jerry Stiller, passed away from natural causes,” the award-winning actor and director said in a tweet. “He was a great dad and grandfather, and the most dedicated husband to Anne for about 62 years,” Stiller added. “He will be greatly missed. Love you Dad.” Jason Alexander, who played George in “Seinfeld,” described his screen dad as a “beloved friend.” “He was perhaps the kindest man I ever had the honor to work beside,” Alexander tweeted. “He made me laugh when I was a child and every day I was with him. A great actor, a great man, a lovely friend.”—AFP



This file photo taken on September 27, 2007 shows US actor Jerry Stiller arriving for the premiere of “The Heartbreak Kid” in Los Angeles.



This file photo taken on February 9, 2007 shows US actors Jerry Stiller (left) and his wife Anne Meara (right) posing with their children Amy (second left) and Ben (second right), after being honored with a Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Hollywood, California.— AFP photos



In this file photo Microsoft Xbox boss Phil Spencer addresses the audience at the Microsoft Xbox press event ahead of the E3 gaming convention in Los Angeles on June 9, 2019.—AFP

Greenberg said that Microsoft’s own game studio is hard at work on hit franchises such as “Halo” only offered on Xbox or Windows-powered personal computers. Xbox Games Studio head Matt Booty said titles from Xbox game studios will be shown off in July. While many titles may be played on different consoles, Sony has a strong library of exclusive content such as Horizon Zero Dawn, God of War and Marvel’s Spider-Man, according to analysts who point out that Microsoft has a difficult challenge.

“While, from what we have been told so far, we know the Xbox Series X will, on paper, have stronger specifications than the PS5, Sony has a tight grip on the gaming market,” said market tracker Futuresource. The stars on Thursday were third-party studios including game world giants Ubisoft and Electronic Arts. Assassin’s Creed fans got a glimpse of a keenly-anticipated “Valhalla” installment to the franchise, set in a time of Vikings.—AFP