

Scripted Israel Celebrates Israeli Artists in Inaugural Hollywood Summit

By Malina Saval ▾



Courtesy Anthony Ortiz, VZ Content

The rooftop terrace of Hollywood's Neuehouse was abuzz Thursday night at a fete celebrating Scripted Israel, a social summit promoting Israeli television on the global stage. The inaugural four-day event, which ran Sept. 19-21, paired 28 Israeli delegates – selected by partners at Jerusalem's esteemed Sam Spiegel Series Lab and the Israeli Producers Association – with development and content executives in Hollywood, serving as a de facto workshop experience for TV writers and producers angling to make their splash Stateside.

Tchelet Semel, Director of Cultural Affairs, Consulate General of Israel, Los Angeles, and Daniel Susz, Director of Film & TV in North America, Israel Office of Cultural Affairs, Consulate General of Israel, were chief on-the-ground organizers of the summit.

Representatives from NewFilmmakers Los Angeles, which produced the one-on-one sessions, along with members of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and prominent development execs at streamers, studios and talent agencies such as Netflix, Apple TV Plus, Sony Pictures Entertainment and Amazon Studios were on hand at the music-fueled, closing-night bash, where guests ranging from Sarah Idan, a musician-slash-2017 Miss Universe Iraq, to Danna Stern, global television executive and founder of Israeli broadcaster Yes Studios, rubbed elbows with Israeli media exec and TV producer Alon Shtruzman, who recently stepped down as CEO of Keshet after a decade-long run with the powerhouse company, and Yoni Paran, CEO of Paran Studios.

Hillel Newman, Consul General of Israel in Los Angeles, notes that “we conceived the idea for [Scripted Israel] about a year and a half ago, but it took about another year and a half to get it all together.”

“The idea behind it was that, up until now, the success of writers and producers and artists in Israel has been on individual levels,” Newman adds. “We decided to organize a platform where the top producers and upcoming stars of Israel – the content creators in Israel – come to Los Angeles. This is the way you foster relationships, build bridges of culture and work together.”

Delegates included Shai Eines, co-CEO of Artza Productions (Oded Davidoff's award-winning melodrama “The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem”); documentarians Tomer Heymann and Leigh Heyman, Heymann Brothers Films; TV scribe Omri Van Essen (“Fauda,” “Tehran”); Naomi Levari and Saar Yogev of Black Sheep Film Productions; and Talia Harris Ram, tv and film manager at the Jerusalem-based Deborah Harris Agency, which reps famed authors David Grossman and Sayed Kashua.

“We currently hold 30 options [of intellectual property] with companies all over, including the United States, France, Germany and Israel,” says Harris Ram. “There are projects that are more suitable for the U.S. market, projects that are more suitable for the European, Latin American and Africa markets. We're really open to finding something for everyone.”

Thanks to hit series such as “Homeland,” developed from the original Israeli format, and “Fauda,” created by Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff, Israel's standing in scripted television popularity continues to soar; per analytics research company Omdia, Israel ranks second, after the U.K., in terms of scripted drama formats sold to the U.S. market.

To that end, the Scripted Israel delegates shared one collective goal: to amplify their artistic projects amongst American and global audiences.

“We received such a warm welcome from the American [entertainment] industry here in Hollywood,” says Yogev, who produced “Dismissed,” a darkly comic half-hour series created by Nir Berger and Atara Frish that revolves around delinquents in a unit of female Israeli soldiers.

The series kicks off its second season this October.

“Coming to L.A. through Scripted Israel, we opened windows,” Yogev continues. “I'm not saying that tomorrow we're going to sign the deal, but there is now an open track of communication. That's the most important thing.”

Stern, who shepherded such series as “Fauda,” “As We See It” and “Your Honor” while at Yes, is optimistic that Scripted Israel will provide Israeli artists with the networking opportunities needed to leverage their creative star power.

“People that attend Scripted Israel are going to come away with greater connections and a better understanding of how the U.S. market works,” she says. “People are here looking for how to navigate the system and find more opportunities to tell [Israel's] stories, whether in the original Hebrew or other formats.”

Others in attendance at the Neuehouse soiree included Ari Ingel, director of Creative Community for Peace, a non-profit organization aimed at promoting the arts as a pathway to peace, actor-writer Noam Ash (“The Other Two”) and Hallel Silverman, a Tel Aviv-based content creator and activist.

Scripted Israel, notes Silverman, whose aunt is actor and comedian Sarah Silverman, not only delivers a well-deserved boon to Israeli artists on a professional level, but in terms of international relations as well.

“The beauty is that the stories painted in film, television and music reflect that of its society – and that opens us [up] to the ability to understand each other better,” she says.

Baghdad-born Idan, who worked as a linguist for the United States military before making a name for herself on the pageantry circuit and becoming a peace activist-slash-veritable pin-up star in Israel, believes that “the arts, more than anything, can bring people together.”

Scripted Israel, she proffers, is the perfect opportunity to bridge cultural divides.

“The arts [are] the only language where you can connect through your experiences, whether it's music or writing or acting,” says Idan. “You see, you feel, you hear. I believe the arts will bring people together more than politics.”

There were myriad moments over the course of Scripted Israel that Stern compares to “capturing lightning in a bottle,” contacts made between writers and producers that signaled the start of professional partnerships in the small screen arena.

“In our business, sometimes things just come about in the strangest way,” says Stern. “I saw so many of these moments where somebody is saying, ‘I'm looking for this,’ and then there's a producer and he's looking for the exact same thing. You know, you don't get these big deals in 72 hours. These things never happen overnight – it's a slow burn. But what I saw this week at Scripted Israel was, to me, like little seedlings. And they are going to flower and blossom.”

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