The Lahiton/Cinema World Image Collection
at Stanford University Libraries

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Lahiton magazine was founded in 1969 by two partners, Uri Aloni and David Paz, and was funded by an investment from Avraham Alon, a Ramlah nightclub owner and promoter. Uri Aloni was a pop culture writer and rabid music fan while David Paz, another popular music enthusiast, was an editor who knew his way around the technical side of print production. The name “Lahiton,” reportedly invented by entertainers Rivka Michaeli and Ehud Manor, combines the Hebrew words for hit, “lahit” and newspaper, “iton.”
Uri Aloni cites the British fan magazines Melody Maker and New Music Express as influences; (Eshed 2008) while living in London and writing for the pop music columns of Yediot Ahronot and La-Isha, he would lift editorial content and photos from the latest British pop magazines, write articles, then find an Israel-bound traveler at the London airport to transport the articles into the hands of his editors. In Lahiton’s early days, Aloni and Paz continued this practice (Edut 2014). Eventually, however Lahiton’s flavor became uniquely secular Israeli. Although in 1965 the Beatles were famously denied permission to perform in Israel (Singer 2015), by the time Lahiton got started in 1969 there was no stemming the tide; the international pop music scene had permeated Israel’s insular and conservative culture. At the time there were no other Hebrew publications that covered what was going on both at home and in America and Europe. Lahiton began as a bimonthly publication, but within the first year, when press runs of 5000 copies sold out on a regular basis, Paz and Aloni turned it into a weekly. The price was set low because they knew that lots of young people would buy it. Sales eventually reached a peak in 1973 of 35,000 copies per issue, a tremendous number relative to Israel’s population at the time.
After the Yom Kippur War, national morale was low. Lahiton experienced a decrease in sales that eventually led to a 1976 merger with the old-school fan magazine Olam ha-Kolnoa—Cinema World. Although the editors later realized that the two publications appealed basically to the same pool of readers, the merger was initially a success. The magazine’s first sections covered music while the second half covered cinema and television. Lahiton/Cinema World was the first publication to feature a full television schedule for Israel’s single TV channel. (Edut 2014) The most popular features of Lahiton were the gossip columns; the foldout color posters of the stars that appeared in each issue; as well as a section featuring song lyrics in both English and Hebrew called “milim la-lahitim.” (Eshed 2008)
David Paz and Uri Aloni left Lahiton in the early 1980s. By that time the country’s large newspapers had all begun in-depth coverage of popular culture while Lahiton failed to innovate, lost writers to the mainstream press, and sank into stagnation. It folded in 1991.
The Collection’s Series

- Cinema: Actors & films
- Competitions/Festivals
- Dance/Visual arts
- Entertainers
- Foreign celebrity visits to Israel
- “General subjects” i.e. Karate
- Military entertainment
- Military leaders/Politicians
- Music: Singers; musicians; bands
- Television
- Theater

The approximately 20,000 black and white photos; color slides; and other ephemera that make up the Lahiton/Cinema World Archive were rescued from the rubbish heap by a reporter who wrote for the magazine for several years in the 1980s. Kedem Auctions, based in Jerusalem, acted as agent for the collection and initially offered for sale individual photo lots. Several lots involving big celebrities were sold before Stanford University Libraries purchased the remainder of the collection.

Most of the collection photos have stamps on the back identifying some of the people depicted along with suggested subjects. The one seen here is marked with a tsadi, for Tsevai, or military.
Re-arranging the collection

Label on verso: “Karate (subjects)"

“Roger Moore Rafael Halperin Karate (subjects)”

“Marko Sadeh Roger Moore Promoters (subjects)”

Israeli cultural studies researcher Etan Bloom assisted with the arrangement of the images, explaining his methodology in an essay that accompanied the collection. While archivists usually strive to adhere to the first principle of archiving, which is to maintain a collection’s original order to the greatest extent possible, Bloom explains how he removed many of the images from their obvious contexts by cherry-picking various photographs into new categories. He did this both for the purpose of creating individual lots for the auction house that might be more marketable and in order to manipulate the collection so that it conformed to his own notions of how it may be used by future researchers.

In my work on the collection, which has required complete rehousing into archive-safe folders and boxes, I took apart some of these artificially created categories. For example, the collection contains several images circa 1979 of actor Roger Moore, who at the time was an international superstar and remains highly recognizable. Three of the images appear to have been taken at the same venue on the same day. Although I’m no martial arts expert, I know that karate competitions are done in bare feet and two-piece uniforms, not lace-up shoes and bath robes. Thanks to Wikipedia, I learned that Rafael Halperin was a professional Israeli wrestler whose career would have been winding down in the late 1970s before he became a Rabbi and successful eyewear entrepreneur. Roger Moore is of particular importance to Lahiton because an earlier, wildly popular visit of his was the first of many celebrity visits sponsored by the magazine. I’ll discuss those visits in more detail a bit later.
The Lahiton archive contains a large number of military entertainment images. These entertainment ensembles of the IDF came to prominence in the early to mid-1950s, and their role as the wellspring for Israel's popular culture scene during the 1960s, 70s and 80s cannot be overstated.
Made up of a constantly rotating supply of conscripted soldiers who gained admission through rigorous auditions, the ensembles consisted of ten to fifteen members who performed songs and skits for both their command divisions as well for paying audiences. These ensembles served several purposes: boosting troop morale and promoting unit cohesion, but also as “a cultural tool that introduced [the sons and daughters of recently arrived immigrants] to the essence of Israeliness.” (Seroussi 2004, 91) The songs they performed provided a patriotic soundtrack for the entire country.
The most successful ensembles during this period were those of the Nahal; the Northern Command; the Central Command; and the Armored Forces. Military ensembles served as a defacto state-sponsored training network for Israeli entertainers. They also provided employment to civilian writers and composers who created new programs each year or two with the arrival of fresh ensemble conscripts. Many of the program songs were recorded as record albums.
In the early days until the period leading up to the Six Day War, the programs were simple, low budget affairs. In 1967, corresponding to high national morale and burgeoning economy that followed Israel’s military victory, the military productions became more elaborate and the number of ensembles increased. Suddenly every area commander had to have one and there was an arms race of sorts in the scale of the productions. Then in the late 1960s, television arrived in Israel and gradually made its way into people’s homes. Military performers were featured, often in professionally produced music videos shot on location. Ensemble soloists suddenly became recognizable celebrities when audiences saw their faces for the first time. (Seroussi 2004) The list of elite Israeli performers who came out of the military entertainment system is extremely long, including singers Arik Einstein, Matti Caspi, Shlomo Artzi, Miri Aloni, Shula Chen, Yardena Arazi, Yehoram Gaon, and Yigal Bashan; actors Oded Kotler, Haim Topol, and Moni Moshonov; entertainers Tsiпи Shavit, Tuvia Tzafir, and Dudu Topaz; and too many others to list here.
Referring to the period following the Six Day War, Uri Avnery, former editor of Ha-olam ha-zeh, describes it aptly: “I called this period the ‘ship of fools.’ ... The entire country was in a state of euphoria, the military officers were gods and the supreme god was Moshe Dayan. There was a general air of optimism: Our power was unlimited, our army was unbeatable and we could do whatever we pleased. It was reflected in everything – in poetry and art – until the Yom Kippur War came and put an end to it.” (Izikovich 2013)

Images from the Lahiton collection abundantly illustrate the celebrity status of some of Israel’s leaders, as well as the extent to which many of them took every opportunity to mingle with local and international entertainers.
In the mid-1960s, Israeli beat groups, drawing heavy inspiration from British and American bands, began forming. These groups predominantly consisted of young middle and lower class men who for the most part did not come through the military band system and therefore lacked the connections to secure record deals. Performing mainly in the clubs of Ramla and Bat Yam, they had names like “Albatros;” “ha-halomot;”
Beat groups: “ha-katsefet,” “ha-meyuashim”; “Ha-sodot;”
“halom kosmi” and my personal favorite, “ha-Moskitos,” identified as “four Armenian students from East Jerusalem.”
Much has been written on the history and place of Muzikah Mizrahit in Israeli culture. In the context of the Lahiton archive, this subseries includes mainly musicians who either came to Israel as young children or who were born in Israel to parents who had emigrated from Arabic-speaking countries in the mass Aliyot of 1948-1951. Performers such as Haim Moshe, Zohar Argov, Shimi Tavori, and many more initially achieved success both in their communities and to some extent among Israeli Arabs by self-marketing albums recorded on tape cassettes; some of these titles sold in the hundreds of thousands. With a few notable exceptions such as Izhar Cohen and Avi Toledano, the majority of these musicians were not products of the military band system. Lahiton promoted these artists at a time when they were not yet taken seriously by the mainstream press.
The images shown here also illustrate Lahiton’s frequent practice of photographing celebrities in their homes and with their families. The pose of people in their kitchens lifting a lid from an empty pot was repeated over and over.
Izhar Cohen was born in Israel in 1951 to a musical family of Yemenite descent. As a child he performed throughout the community with his father and at age 18 was accepted to the Nahal ensemble. Following his military service he launched a very successful solo career, in which Lahiton played a part. Lahiton cofounder Uri Aloni claims credit for arranging sponsorship in 1973 for the first-ever Israeli entrant to compete in the Eurovision Song Contest in Luxembourg. Israeli singer Ilanit took fourth place in 1973 with the song “Ey Sham.” That year her song was chosen by a committee from the Israeli Broadcasting Authority. By 1978, however, the broadcasting authority had made the decision to change the Israel Song Festival, which previously had been a showcase for government-vetted popular artists, into an open competition known as the Pre-Eurovision Contest, or kedam erovizyon. Izhar Cohen was the winner that year, with the song Abanibi by Nurit Hirsh and Ehud Manor, backed up by his group Alfabeta. Cohen went on to take first place in the international competition that was held in Paris.
Lahiton’s founders believed it was important to keep the magazine’s coverage positive and present their subjects in a flattering light. David Paz explains the practical considerations that went into this decision:

“When you destroy an artist, you have to take into account that they might not cooperate with you in the future. We wanted to provide [them with] a platform and know that the artists are on our side. Later the tone changed a bit but not in an extreme way. Today that looks so naïve and innocent. If we knew that an artist was hiding in the closet, we didn’t out him. We handled everyone with kid gloves and that policy paid off.” (Edut 2014)

Uri Aloni has been quoted as saying, “All of the singers were ours and we nurtured all of them.” (Eshed 2008)

Despite these paternal statements about showing equal love to all their offspring, naturally there were artists who received special attention from Lahiton. Mike Brant was the son of Holocaust survivors who was raised in Israel and loved to sing and perform. Through a series of connections, he established a successful singing career in France in the late 1960 but was largely unknown in Israel for most of that time. Uri Aloni introduced him to Israeli audiences with heavy promotion in Lahiton and he became a huge star in Israel as well. Suffering from depression, he attempted suicide in November, 1974, after which Lahiton published a very sympathetic interview with him. Following his death from suicide in April, 1975, Lahiton published a memorial supplement devoted to his life and career.
Tzvika Pik, one of the most successful singer songwriters to emerge from the era of the beat groups, was a self-styled glam rocker and sex symbol with legions of teenage fans and record sales in the tens of thousands. Despite his popularity, however, his solo work in the early 1970s was not accorded the respect given to such elite performers as Shlomo Artzi, Shalom Hanoch, or Arik Einstein. His music was widely perceived by critics as being overly derivative of Western influences and not “Israeli” enough. (Seroussi 2004)

Lahitom, however, went with its fan base by embracing and promoting Tzvika Pik enthusiastically. In the words of staff writer Orit Yarkoni, “He has the face of an angel, the eyes of a tortured saint, and just gazing at him instills a feeling of sadness.” (Eshed 2008) In one issue, the magazine devoted five pages to a story in which the writer hinted that Tzvika Pik was about to turn his back on pop music by entering a yeshiva and becoming religious. Accompanying photos showed him dressed in conservative clothing outside a yeshiva in Bene Berak; pandemonium ensued. Years later, David Paz admitted that the whole thing had been a publicity stunt with the full cooperation of Tzvika Pik and his manager. (Eshed 2008)
The beautiful, talented, and ultimately tragic Ofra Haza was another Lahiton perennial. In these images she appears to be very relaxed and comfortable in front of the camera, and she’s a good sport as she poses for the ubiquitous kitchen image with pot. Many of the celebrities who posed for Lahiton photographers showed similar levels of comfort and familiarity.
Lahiton pioneered and perfected the practice in Israel of the promotional tour for foreign celebrities. According to Paz and Aloni, Roger Moore’s visit in the early 1970s, at the time his hit TV series “The Saint” was broadcast in Israel, was the most successful of all. David Paz recalls, “There was real hysteria surrounding these visits. When [the celebrities] came to Israel it was like gods coming down from Olympus.” (Eshed 2008)

The visits followed a set format. The stars were greeted at the airport,
Foreign celebrities visit Israel: Press conference

taken to a Tel Aviv hotel for a press conference,
and then whisked off for a whirlwind tour of Israel that included biblical sites;
Foreign celebrities visit Israel: Military base

a military base;
Foreign celebrities visit Israel: Kibbutz tour

Cliff Richard

Jane Fonda with Tom Hayden and son Troy

and a kibbutz.
There were always visits with local dignitaries, especially celebrity hounds like Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek.
Foreign celebrities meet with local VIPs

French-Israeli businessman and Knesset member Shmuel Flatto-Sharon also figures prominently among the foreign celebrity images.
The visits usually featured a tree planting ceremony in a Keren Kayemet forest. Here is an image of a Lahiton souvenir album commemorating the visit of Raymond Burr and hunky sidekick Don Galloway, from the TV series Ironside. I’m curious to know what Burr and Galloway did to deserve the publication of these incredibly unflattering photos.
Thank You!

References


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