

Hi-tech Livia lives on in 'Sopranos' debut

By ANDY GELLER

Livia Soprano has been resurrected — electronically, that is.

Even though actress Nancy Marchand died last summer, the character she created for the "The Sopranos" has been reborn via computer magic for Sunday's debut of the hit cable-TV series' third season.

Using snippets from the show's first two years, special-effects wizards have created a four-minute scene in which the mob matriarch speaks her final, corrosive words to her son, Tony.

A few minutes later she dies, setting the stage for an episode in which family members speak their final, corrosive words about Livia.

Does the electronic Livia — speaking dialogue from the first two seasons — look real?

"People couldn't tell the difference" when the two-episode debut of the HBO hit was previewed at Radio City Music Hall last Wednesday, said Rick Wagonheim, head of the Rhinoceros visual-effects house, which performed the computer wizardry.

The 71-year-old Marchand died last June after battling cancer and chronic pulmonary disease for several years.

Her manipulative character, Livia — who may have ordered a hit on her son — was a huge presence on "The Sopranos" and so the producers decided she just couldn't die off camera.

The producers chose pieces of 18 scenes

from the first two seasons — a sentence here, a sentence there — and wrote a script around them.

Then the script was shot using actor James Gandolfini, who plays Tony, and a body double for Marchand.

The footage was turned over to Rhinoceros, which used a computer to place Marchand's head on the body of the body double.

The result is a four-minute scene in which an aging and remarkably lifelike Livia quickly reaches a flashpoint with Tony.

The only flaws are that Tony and Livia are never face to face and Livia's head sometimes appears too small for her body.

Few will notice — or care.



SHE'S BACK: Computer wizardry enables the late Nancy Marchand's Livia character to make a comeback.