

San Francisco Pride month kicks off with Jane Fonda event and pop up drag shows

By Jana Katsuyama | Published June 1, 2023 11:26PM | KTVU FOX 2 |

Pride month kicks off in San Francisco with Jane Fonda at Castro Theatre and downtown pop-up drag shows

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SAN FRANCISCO - On the first day of Pride, there were no signs of San Francisco's typical "June gloom" weather. The colors of the giant rainbow flag on Market Street were bright against the blue sky, flying high in San Francisco's Castro District.

Kicking off Pride month was a big event at the Castro Theatre that had people lining up down the street and around the block to see actor, activist, and LGBTQ ally Jane Fonda.

Inside, the program started with Grace Tower and the group Queens of the Castro, who got the crowd pumped up with a spirited Fonda-style workout routine, an homage to Fonda's exercise era.

Manny Yekutieli, owner of the restaurant and community hall Manny's in the Mission District, was host of the event, Fonda received a standing ovation as she came dancing onto the stage. Yekutieli welcomed Fonda and sat down for a conversation about LGBTQ rights, her acting career, and her activism that recently has focused on climate change and environmental causes.

Fonda shared thoughts about the pain and persecution many in the LGBTQ+ community feel is pervading current politics.

"You can't expect to win quickly," Fonda told the audience. "No, It's not a sprint. Then I thought, well it's a marathon. But you know what it is? It's a relay race. We'll be passing it on as we go."

The conversation was candid and tapped into this year's SF Pride theme, "Looking back and moving forward."

That message is meaningful to Patrick Carney, one of the founders of Friends of the Pink Triangle, which places a giant triangle on the hill at Twin Peaks every year during Pride Month. Carney says this will be the 28th year of their event.

"It's to recall those in the Holocaust who had to wear pink triangles on their chests," said Carney, explaining the persecution of gay men during World War II by the Nazis, "We keep doing it because we realize how many people don't know that part of the Holocaust."

Downtown, a new Pride program was launched Thursday with the first in a series of weekly pop-up drag shows this month called Drag me Downtown. The events will be held at different downtown businesses from 5-7pm.

"We're trying to promote downtown as more inclusive neighborhood that's diverse, that's beyond the 9 to 5 workday. So having a series of drag performances helps change that narrative," said Robbie Silver, Executive Director of the Downtown San Francisco Partnership.

"What greater opportunity than the first day of pride month to start the kickoff here and celebrate such a great community," said Jennifer Hepworth, Schroeder's event manager who helped plan the event.

Schroeder's cocktail master Che Watson created a special Pride drink, calling it Heklina, in honor of the late drag queen star.

"It's really exciting to bring the beautiful drag community into spaces that we normally wouldn't be and refashion downtown in a fierce and fabulous way. So I'm super excited to be a part of it," said Bobby Friday, host of the Drag Me Downtown program.

"I love that I don't think a lot of people celebrate downtown. I feel like it's very restricted to the other side of the city, so I'm very excited to see how this all goes," said Hudi Goyal, a San Francisco resident who was visiting Schroeder's for the first time.

Along Market Street near the Castro, even the palm trees are lit up in rainbow colors.

As for the pink triangle, it goes up on the 16th and 17th, and they are hoping for hundreds of volunteers.

Many say this year, they feel Pride is needed more than ever.