



LANE SERIES

2002-2003

9/27/02 Red Priest, baroque ensemble	1/31/03 Brazilian Guitar Quartet
10/5/02 Coope, Boyes, Simpson/ Finest Kind	2/14/03 Madame Butterfly
10/11/02 Moscow Chamber w/ Olga Kern, piano*	3/7/03 Adam Kent, piano
10/18/02 Mack Sisters Duo Piano	3/9/03 Ensemble Corund, Bach b minor Mass
10/27/02 Doc Watson w/ Alison Brown*	3/17/03 Danú* St. Patty's Day
10/29/02 La Bohème	3/26/03 Flanders Recorder Quartet
11/8/02 Stanislav Ioudenitch, Cliburn Gold Medalist	3/28/03 Midsummer Night's Dream
11/15/02 Antonio Calogero Jazz Ensemble	4/3/03 Dougie MacLean, singer/ songwriter
11/17/02 Armstrong/Sykes, vocal/keyboards	4/11/03 deMare/Beiser, tango program
11/20/02 Mendelssohn String Quartet	4/26/03 Weilerstein Piano Trio
12/6/02 Kelly Joe Phelps / L. Taylor, Blues	5/2/03 Frederic Chiu, piano

*Co-presented with the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts



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Views: Miracle on Christopher Street

When a gay San Francisco man by the name of Gilbert Baker designed the Rainbow Flag in 1978, he intended it to symbolize the diversity of that city's queer community. Little did he – or anyone else – realize at the time that his six-striped multicolored creation would become recognized the world over as *the* symbol of the queer community's pride.

Yet the diversity of the community that the Rainbow Flag was designed to symbolize has been – and in many places remains – an illusion. Year after year after year, in cities and towns large and small, whenever June rolled around and I've attended a Pride celebration, I've looked out at the crowds – both participants and spectators – and I've always seen a sea of white faces.

To be sure, over the years, I've seen a smattering here and there of black, brown, red and yellow faces, but they were almost all marching or riding floats in the Pride Parade itself. Amongst the thousands of spectators, however, Pride remained an almost exclusively Caucasian affair.

Organizers of Pride celebrations across the country – especially in those cities with majority nonwhite populations, such as Atlanta and Washington, DC – have long scratched their heads trying to figure out why and what to do about it.

When I, a native New Yorker, decided to go home for Pride this year, I was motivated by two factors: 1) this year marked the 20th anniversary of my first Pride celebration, which I experienced in San Francisco after I fled New York, and I felt that after 20 years, it was time for me to come home; and 2) this was New York's first Pride since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. I knew that 9/11 would alter the tenor of New York's Pride celebration – a fact that wasn't lost on its organizers, Heritage of Pride. The theme and logo for Pride New York this year – "Against a Dark Sky, the Rainbow Shines Brightly" – was clearly in response to the World Trade Center disaster.

I had left New York near the very end of 1981, fed up with its skyrocketing housing costs, soaring crime rate (the deadly crack-cocaine wars were just getting started) and its seemingly endless, bitchy and cannibalistic gay politics. But above all, I fled the Big Apple because in 1981, my hometown was a racial time bomb ready to explode.

The city had been racked by a series of racially motivated hate crimes – and even saw violent clashes between blacks and Jews in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

New York's queer community wasn't immune. There were heated demonstrations in front of gay-owned businesses, led by the New York chapter of Black and White Men Together (now known as

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Men of All Colors Together) protesting race discrimination in customer service and employment against black gays by those businesses.

And in October 1981, a black church pastor, acting in a fit of rage after his only son had come out to him as gay, went on a deadly shooting spree in the heavily gay West Village, killing three people and injuring seven others in front of Sneakers, a popular gay bar just off Christopher Street.

the twin towers of the World Trade Center on live television. Two decades of bum-rapping the "Rotten Apple" disintegrated in an instant. I suddenly felt a kinship with New York that I hadn't felt since I left.

It soon became clear to me that the time had come to go home to New York – and I chose Pride Weekend to finally break my 20-year self-imposed exile.

Of course, I knew that New York was – and is – a very different city from the "Rotten Apple" that I fled, especially after 9/11. But in deciding to go to Pride in my native city this year, I had expected to see what I had long grown accustomed to seeing at Pride celebrations: an ocean of overwhelmingly white faces in the crowd and among the marchers.

But when I set up my vantage point along the parade route across the street from the Empire State Building on Fifth Avenue – never imagining before September 11 that it would once again be the city's

And in the post-9/11 atmosphere, the longest and loudest cheers went for this year's Grand Marshals: queer members of New York's Finest and New York's Bravest, along with police officers and firefighters from all over the Northeast and even the French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec (who carried a banner reading "Next Time in Montreal" in French and English, a reference to Montreal's Divers/Cite Pride celebration July 29-August 4).

Indeed, the red, white and blue of Old Glory was as much in evidence as the Rainbow Flag. Even Baker, the Rainbow Flag's creator who now lives in New York, marched down the avenue as a red-white-and-blue-clad Betsy Ross (he appeared in photographs with Mayor Michael Bloomberg in the following day's editions of the *Daily News* and the *New York Post*).

The fact that the crowds were as multicolored as the flag that

After 20 Years, an Expatriate New Yorker Goes Home For Pride and Makes a Stunning Discovery

That the incident occurred in the heat of a hard-fought and racially charged mayoral election contest between then-Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins – seeking to become New York's first black mayor – and then-U.S. Attorney Rudy Giuliani only added fuel to the bitter racial divide (Dinkins won, only to be ousted by Giuliani four years later).

As far as New Yorkers were concerned – especially black New Yorkers – the word "gay" equaled "white." It wasn't safe for black gays to come out, not only because of homophobia, but also because of the "Uncle Tom" syndrome, fear of being branded a "sell-out" to the black community.

Being of mixed African American and Native American descent, I had grown up the repeated target of racial taunts – with the infamous N-word hurled at me more often from blacks unwilling to accept my half-Indian heritage than from whites. Consequently, I didn't finally come out publicly until after I moved to San Francisco.

In the ensuing two decades since I left New York, I must admit that I wasted no opportunity to bad-mouth my old hometown, even vowing to never again set foot on its streets.

But that was before September 11, 2001, when the world watched in horror the destruction of

tallest building – I began to notice something in the crowds lining the avenue that I had never seen before at a Pride celebration.

To be sure, there were a lot of white faces. But I also saw black faces – *lots and lots* of black faces. And they were clad in various adaptations of the Rainbow Flag colors. I also saw a lot of Latino faces (the Puerto Rican Day Parade had marched up Fifth Avenue just three weeks before). A lot of Asian faces. And, most poignantly, a lot of Middle Eastern faces.

And as the Pride Parade progressed down Fifth – Heritage of Pride still insists on calling it a "march" – I saw floats and contingents from groups whose participation in a gay pride celebration would have been unthinkable 20 years ago.

There were Arabs and Jews marching one behind the other; Brazilians celebrating both Pride and their national team's World Cup soccer championship, which it had won just hours earlier; Harlem United, a community-service organization that is not only predominantly black, but decidedly *not* queer-identified.

There were also a large number of floats and contingents from Corporate America: Starbucks Coffee, Fleet Bank, Chase Manhattan Bank, United Airlines, Smirnoff Vodka, the Showtime cable network, New York Life Insurance Company, WKTU-FM Radio, to name a few.

Baker created became even more evident at the post-parade Pride Festival in the West Village. I swear to God, I had never seen so many black, Latino, Asian, Native American and mixed-race queers gathered in one place before in my life! Not to mention people from around the world.

The blacks alone made up nearly half the crowd, which police estimated at 250,000. No estimate was given for the number of spectators at the parade itself; its incredible seven-mile length – the longest route of any parade in the city – makes such estimates impossible.

The incredible racial and ethnic diversity of both the parade marchers and the spectators who cheered them on was far beyond anything I had expected – indeed, anything I had dared hope to see happen in my lifetime.

Remembering the ugly, UGLY racial tensions that gripped New York in the late '70s and early '80s, I broke down and cried tears of joy at bearing witness to what I can only call a miracle.

A miracle on Christopher Street. ▼

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