

A&E

'The Pope' does Pride

After recovering from major surgery, Carole Pope is kicking off her comeback tour at Hamilton's Pride festivities Saturday

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Special to The Hamilton Spectator

Pride Hamilton is still a small, grassroots event, but it's already landed "the Pope."

Carole Pope is headlining Saturday's Pride festivities in Gage Park for the first time.

The queer feminist icon burst onto the Toronto music scene in the 1970s as Rough Trade's provocative lead singer. She'll be playing her first show since reconstructive back surgery last year — the first in a string of Canadian tour dates this summer.

As she gets ready to play the historic Gage Park bandshell, Pope talks inspiration, her long recovery, and Stonewall at 50.

The androgynous frontwoman for Rough Trade, the New Wave band that once toured with David Bowie, Pope pioneered a flamboyant brand of queer performance that inspired a generation.

The band's 1980 hit single, "High School Confidential," is still a popular anthem. As a solo artist, Pope's recent collaborators have included Peaches, on the EP "Music for Lesbians," and Theremin prodigy Clara Venice, on 2017's "This Is Not A Test."

Last summer, Pope, who is in her early 70s, had major surgery for spinal stenosis. Her recovery is ongoing. "It was and still is intense. My surgeon neglected to tell me recovery would take a year or more. I'm doing physical therapy every day."

"Tantric sex is difficult," she quips. "But seriously, a lot of people are getting spine related injuries because they



COURTESY OF CAROLE POPE

Carole Pope will be at Saturday's Pride festivities in Gage Park.

spend hours bent over their phones and tablets."

But don't expect her black bondage kimono to make an appearance on-stage today. "That coat is actually a vintage Vivienne Westwood piece from the '80s. I don't think I could perform in it. I met Vivienne once and she was wearing a tartan version of it."

Now based in Los Angeles, Carole Pope was born outside Manchester and grew up in Scarborough, Ont. ("I lived in Aldershot for a second.") Being an outsider, stuck out in the suburbs, was part of what inspired the young Pope to leave home and join a band.

"As a kid I dreamt of moving downtown and hanging out with musicians," she says. "I left home as a teenager and moved to Yorkville, which was the epicentre of the music scene in Toronto. I had a vivid imagination and a hunger to experience anything and everything."

She demurs when asked about being a queer Canadian icon. "I don't really

think of myself as an icon," she says. "Writing and performing is a passion and I'm happy that my work still resonates with people."

Pride has even more resonance this year with the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, the 1969 protests. "We've definitely progressed and people are more accepting of the LGBTQ2S community," says Pope. "People are embracing gender fluid artists like Janelle Monáe and St. Vincent," as well as mainstream TV shows that "push the boundaries of gender and identity."

But she notes the contradiction, south of the border, where gay and transgender rights are attacked and affirmed in equal measure. "We have to deal with so much confusion and upheaval. We need to protect our hard-won rights and never get complacent."

So does Hamilton have anything in common with L.A.? "Well, they share a love for eccentric characters." The theme of this year's Pride is Liberation, and it fits.

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