

STUDIO 117! DISCO ERA'S IN SPOTLIGHT AT SUNRISE THEATRE FOUNDATION BASH

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For 33 months in the late 1970s, Studio 54 was the place to be and be seen. If you got past the velvet ropes, you could be next to Andy Warhol, Michael Jackson, Cher, Brooke Shields, Grace Jones and David Bowie. It was the disco era, with glitter balls, strobe lights, fancy outfits and outrageous goings-on.

For one night only, Aug. 3, from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m., Studio 117 is the place to see and be seen, as the Sunrise Theatre Foundation turns the Fort Pierce theater into the Treasure Coast's largest dance club. You'll again have the chance to mingle with the likes of Andy Warhol and the rest, as you dance, watch aerialists perform and see the sights that take you back to the golden age of disco.

Chris Cichorek is the Sunrise Theatre Foundation chair. He said that the fun will begin before event-goers step inside.

"There will be exotic cars parked outside as people walk up. As they proceed in, they'll be greeted by bouncers and velvet ropes will lead into the main theater, where there will be disco music all night, special lighting effects, disco mirrored balls and smoke machines. On stage, there will be performances by aerialists from the Florida Aerial Dance & Circus Arts School. There will be hors d'oeuvres, a cash bar, a screening of 'Saturday Night Fever' in the Black Box, and a few surprises," he said.

As an added treat, actors will portray famous Studio 54 denizens and there will be a costume contest with prizes for the best dressed and most outlandish outfits.

There will also be a Silent Auction, with some items related to the theater, including autographed guitars from Dave Mason and Lou Gramm of Foreigner, and autographed toy cars from Jay Leno. Memorabilia packets with items relating to the Sunrise will also be offered.

This year's event is an outgrowth of the success of last year's Speakeasy Gala.

"People enjoyed themselves so much last year that we wanted to continue to provide a fun night out," Cichorek said. "It really engages people all night long."

The event has a serious purpose. The Sunrise Foundation utilizes donations and sponsorships to expand theatrical programs

for children and enhance the theater experience for all patrons. Studio 117 is the Foundation's chief 2024 fundraising event.

Last year, the Foundation was able to expand children's programs. During the 2023 Children's Summer Theater program, scholarships were awarded to underprivileged children who had not had the opportunity to experience live theater. The Foundation also underwrote the summer camp, presented this year by StageFright Academy, a Fort Pierce-based group.

A grant from the Children's Services Council helped create the Happy & Hopeful Program, which provided tickets for kids and their parents to experience a live professional evening performance together.

Finally, children were brought to the theater as a class for child-appropriate daytime experiences. The Foundation paid for the bus transportation to the Sunrise.

To enhance the theater-going experience for patrons, the Foundation was able to purchase a 22,000-pixel professional projector for movie and performance use. This was the single largest commitment for the Foundation. "We can attract more artists that demand that sort of equipment," Cichorek said. "Before, the theater had to rent it at \$7,000 a night. This will help (the Sunrise) reduce expenses and become more profitable."

Also new was the Stairway to Heaven campaign, launched in honor of the late John Wilkes, the theater's former director. The goal is the installation of two handrails leading from the main lobby to the entrance to the main theater. This will help patrons better navigate the stairs. Cichorek is pleased that it will be completed before the event.

Next up is raising funds for a new electronic marquee that will stand out as it faces Second Street. "It will be more 21st century," Cichorek said.

Last year's event raised almost \$60,000, breaking records. The Foundation hopes to match or exceed that through the event and its sponsorships.

The Sunrise Theatre is located at 117 S. Second St., Fort Pierce. For more information about the gala, call 772-461-4775 or visit sunrisetheatre.com. ■



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