

Jane Fonda talks her speaking tour, political activism and the art of getting younger with age

July 2, 2019 by Shannon Gormley



Image courtesy of Jane Fonda Facebook page

Jane Fonda doesn't want you to ask her about career. She'd much rather get into deeper, messier subjects.

On July 9, the 81-year-old actress, activist and exercise guru will appear at the Muriel Kauffman Theatre, the last stop of five-city speaking tour and career retrospective. The engagement comes months after the release of a lengthy HBO documentary about her life, *Jane Fonda in Five Acts*, and while a sequel to *9 to 5* is in the works. A promo video for the mini-tour splices together clips of Fonda in a chain metal crop top in *Barbarella*, alongside Robert Redford in *Barefoot in the Park* and *Our Souls at Night*, giving her Oscar-winning performance as a call girl in *Klute* and, in *Monster-in-Law*, tackling a Britney Spears lookalike who thinks Roe v. Wade is a boxing match.

But, speaking over the phone from her home in LA, Fonda says she's not exactly interested in discussing her acting credits during the Q&A portion of her Kansas City talk. That's fair enough. Now that a new generation of activists are rising against reality-warping adversaries, Fonda's belief in self-reflection and self-assurance — along with her history of preserving through ruthless backlash in order to stand up for what's right—is especially potent.

Before the event, we talked to Fonda about ignoring the haters, getting younger with age and why Donald Trump's election prevented her from retirement.

435 Magazine: You've talked about the value of an examined life, which you've done through an HBO documentary, through your memoir. Does this tour allow you to examine your life in a different way than those other projects?

Jane Fonda: I'm told that the series is going to be some local person, I guess a media person, will interview me about my career, and there will be clips shown. That's what I think is what is going to happen. So it's going to be career focused, except during the Q&A when I hope we can get into other things.

What do you hope to get into?

The importance of living an intentional life, growing older and what that's like, the current situation in the world and what we're going to do about it, stuff like that.

Does your reluctance to retire have anything to do with the current political climate?

Totally, oh yeah. I was intending to live my eighties very differently, but when what happened happened, it changed everything, and I realized that I had to go back out again and become an activist again. Well, I was always an activist, but become more active as an activist.

When you started working as an activist during the Vietnam War, when people were trying to basically gaslight you by accusing you of things like losing your sense of humor, nagging, going down the wrong path, did that ever get to you?

No, because I know who I am and why I did what I did. But I didn't like it, it was not pleasant. But I was not by myself, I was part of a movement, I was part of an organization, I had my husband who was a movement leader. When you know what you're doing and why you're doing it and you are embedded in a community of like minded people, and you feel that what you're doing is right and that will ultimately save lives, that gives you the wherewithal to withstand the slings and arrows.

Yeah, now people get dismissed as snowflakes.

You gotta stand up. The worse it got, the more I just said, they are not going to get me. I'm not going to let them win. I'm going to keep going and I'm going to come the other side. And I did.

You say in *Jane Fonda in Five Acts* that when you were 20, you were so old. What did you mean by that, and what would you tell that younger version of yourself now?

I slept all the time, I was always tired, I was depressed, I got sick a lot, I saw no future for myself, I was sure that I would die alone from drugs or alcohol. Life is much, much better now. I discovered that Picasso once said, "It takes a long time to become young," and it's the truth. Being young is so hard. So what I would have said to my 20-year-old self is Jane, you are feeling shitty, but just know, it's very, very hard to be young, and just don't give up. Just try to figure out who you are and try to make that person the best that it can be, and just take it one day at a time and don't give up. And stand up straight. I'm a big believer in good posture.

You said that you're hoping to dig into real stuff in the Q&A part of your Kansas City talk, but is there anything that you find difficult to open up about publicly?

Nope. Nothing is off the plate. I'll talk about anything.

GO: Kauffman Center, 1601 Broadway Blvd., Kansas City, Mo. 7:30 pm. \$49-50.
kauffmancenter.org.

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Kay Wheeler
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