

coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN



Al Roker, Savannah Guthrie (center) and Hoda Kotb host NBC's coverage of The 95th Annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on Thursday.

For this year's Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, the bands are back together.

Last time, the event altered some traditions to meet coronavirus-pandemic protocols, one being the postponement of appearances by marching bands from schools across the country. Since the parade won't be for television only for 2021, spectators will be back as will the bands as NBC broadcasts the 95th annual edition of the New York holiday procession Thursday, Nov. 25. "Today's" Savannah Guthrie, Hoda Kotb and Al Roker will have their usual roles as the three-hour special's hosts.

"We were so happy to get to do a parade, in whatever form it came," Guthrie recalls of last year's procession ... with Kotb adding, "Every time the Macy's Parade comes around, it reminds you that life is getting a little bit back to normal. The fact that we're going to have some of the crowd back just gives me that feeling of, 'We're on a roll. Let's keep it going.' And I think this is emblematic of the route on which we're hopefully heading."

The number of people permitted to line the parade route will be reduced from the norm by 10 to 20 percent. New character balloons include Groggu (or "Baby Yoda") from "The Mandalorian" and the title figure from "Ada Twist, Scientist." Among the scheduled performers are Carrie Underwood, Kristin Chenoweth (whose former show "WICKED" will be among Broadway hits

represented by musical numbers), Darren Criss, Kelly Rowland, Jimmie Allen, the Muppets and the Rockettes.

For typical parade-route-walker Roker, doing the 2020 version was memorable for a number of reasons, including the fact that he'd had prostate-cancer surgery just a couple of weeks earlier.

"Once you're in the teeth of (the parade), you're not really thinking about anything else," the genial meteorologist maintains. "In planning my surgery, my goal was to have recuperated to be ready for the parade. It's a touchstone for me, so it provided a certain sense of normalcy, even though it wasn't a normal parade. It was one I really needed, and I think a lot of people needed it."

The ongoing existence of the Macy's Parade comforts Guthrie, who says it would be that way whether she was a part of it or not: "To have that continuity is really important and really meaningful. It'll mean a lot for people to be back out there participating."

Kotb believes that might pertain especially to the band members, since she reasons, "It's their moment in the spotlight. I always picture their parents with their noses glued to the TV, being like, 'That's my kid!' The fact that that's back brings an element that's beyond balloons. It's maybe the most real part of the parade."

The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade returns to normal – somewhat

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