

‘We are still fighting’: Ukrainian Day in S.F. takes on new meaning during brutal war

By **Sam Whiting**, Staff Writer

Aug 24, 2025



Anna Bevziuk was 7 years old and a world away on Aug. 24, 1991, but she remembers going to the polls with her father, then going home to watch television in her family’s apartment in the city of Oleksandriya. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev came on with a special report.

“I remember the moment, glued to the TV,” she said Sunday. “My father turned to me and said, ‘This means Independence for us.’”

It still did, 34 years later, as Bevziuk, now 40 and a Mountain View resident, stood on the stage at the bandshell in Golden Gate Park, wearing a traditional costume as part of Zoloti Maky, a Ukrainian dance ensemble that was performing as part of Ukrainian Day, a San Francisco celebration in honor of Ukrainian Independence Day.

With backing by the Golden Gate Park Band, the celebration has happened for 26 years, but Sunday was that rare day when it fell on the exact anniversary of independence from the Soviet Union. This made it mean more to the approximately 600 audience members, some draped in the light blue and yellow flag and wearing traditional *vyshyvanka* shirts to complement the performers onstage.



Anna Bevziuk gets help from Olena Kovtash as dancers prepare to perform during the Ukrainian Independence Day celebration in Golden Gate Park.

Scott Strazzante/S.F. Chronicle

“We want to support our culture and our country,” said Julie K., a Redwood City resident who fled when the war with Russia began, also on the 24th day of the month, in February 2022. As a little girl in a crown of flowers bravely belted out a traditional Ukrainian song to start the show, Julie stood with her husband and their 7-year-old son, both named Vladimir and both wearing *vyshyvankas*.

“In a couple of minutes,” she said. “I will start to cry.”

The fact that Ukrainian Day in San Francisco fell on Ukrainian Independence Day, combined with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s attacks on their homeland, hung as heavy as the fog on the performers, who were determined to show strength and resilience and even joy in the face of it all.

“They said Ukraine wouldn’t stand for two weeks, and here we are still fighting,” Bevziuk said of the 3.5-year-old invasion as she waited to perform. “Every Ukrainian has a lot of emotions and is proud that we’re still standing and putting up a good fight.”



Nataliya Kovlchuk holds a "Stop Putin, Stop War" flag during the Ukrainian Independence Day celebration in Golden Gate Park.

Scott Strazzante/S.F. Chronicle

Ukrainian Day was sponsored by the Ukrainian-American Coordinating Council in cooperation with the Ukrainian Heritage Club of Northern California and the Northern California branch of the Ukrainian National Women's League of America. Everyone gathered was in the spirit, including the 30 members of the Golden Gate Park Band, which has been putting on an annual concert for the Ukrainian community since 1964, when Mayor John Shelley introduced it. The brass band supplied backup to the electric and taped music supplied by the performance troupes.

"We are all honorary Ukrainians today," said Mark Nemoyten, the band's music director.

The concert ended with the national chant "Slava Ukrainsi," which

≡ San Francisco Chronicle



2026 SALE! 3 Months for 25¢

The Soviet Union was not formally dissolved until Dec. 26, 1991, but Aug.

24, when more than 90% of Ukraine's citizens voted by referendum to declare it an independent state, is the date that counts.



Daria Turiv, 9, sings as her sister, Victoria, 2, watches her performance during the Ukrainian Independence Day celebration in Golden Gate Park.

Scott Strazzante/S.F. Chronicle



"It's like July 4 meaning so much to Americans," said

Melanie McCutchan of the Women's League. "Given the horrible struggle

th

STORIED DIAMOND

Desert Sands of Eternity

JARED

JEWELERS

SHOP NOW



itself, coming together as a

is give us strength to maintain

view is too young to

remember the vote for independence, but she knows what it stood for and that every aspect of Ukrainian life is under attack and at risk. That is why she is the choreographer of the dance troupe Leleka.

"Even during the war when it is hard to celebrate anything, we want people to know who we are and to share our history," she said before the performance. "The language and the culture are the main reasons we want to save an independent Ukraine. Language and culture and history are more important than territory."

Aug 24, 2025



Sam Whiting

REPORTER



Sam Whiting has been a staff writer at The San Francisco Chronicle since 1988. He started as a feature writer in the People section, which was anchored by Herb Caen's column, and has written about people ever since. He is a general assignment reporter with a focus on writing feature-length obituaries. He lives in San Francisco and walks three miles a day on the steep city streets.