

2011-J1537

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION commemorating the 112th birthday of Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington and his tremendous contributions to music of the 20th Century, specifically jazz, blues and gospel

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize and commend those musical geniuses who brought entertainment and cultural enrichment to the citizens of the great Empire State; and

WHEREAS, Edward Kennedy Ellington was born on April 29, 1899, to James Edward Ellington and Daisy Kennedy Ellington; Daisy and James Edward were both pianists; and

WHEREAS, At the age of seven, Edward Kennedy Ellington began taking piano lessons; his mother surrounded him with dignified women to reinforce his manners and taught him to live elegantly; and

WHEREAS, Edward Kennedy Ellington's childhood friends noticed that "his casual, offhand manner, easy grace, and his dapper dress gave him the bearing of a young nobleman"; they began calling him "Duke"; Duke credited his "chum" Edgar McEntree for the nickname; and

WHEREAS, Duke Ellington once stated, "I think he felt that in order for me to be eligible for his constant companionship, I should have a title. So he called me Duke."; and

WHEREAS, A prominent figure in the history of jazz, Duke Ellington's music stretched into various other genres, including blues, gospel, film scores, popular, and classical; his career spanned more than 50 years and included leading his orchestra, composing an inexhaustible songbook, attaining credits for movies, and composing stage musicals and world tours; and

WHEREAS, Duke Ellington's work has come to be recognized as a cornerstone of American culture and heritage; he is widely regarded as the most important composer in jazz, and was also a galvanizing bandleader

who inspired many of his musicians to produce their best work, whilst himself being a significant exponent of jazz piano; and
WHEREAS, When asked what inspired him to write, Duke Ellington had replied, "My men and my race are the inspiration of my work. I try to catch the character and mood and feeling of my people."; and
WHEREAS, Thanks to his inventive use of the orchestra, or big band, and thanks to his eloquence and extraordinary charisma, Duke Ellington is generally considered to have elevated the perception of jazz to an art form on a par with other traditional genres of music; and
WHEREAS, Duke Ellington influenced millions of people both at home and around the world; he gave American music its own sound for the first time; throughout his 50-year career, he played over 20,000 performances in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East as well as Asia; and
WHEREAS, Duke Ellington was awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1966; he was later awarded several other prizes, the US Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969, and the Legion of Honor by France in 1973, the highest civilian honors in each country; and
WHEREAS, Duke Ellington died on May 24, 1974, a month after his 75th birthday, and is buried in the Bronx, New York City; at his funeral attended by over 12,000 people at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine located in Harlem, New York, Ella Fitzgerald summed up the occasion by stating, "It's a very sad day...A genius has passed."; and
WHEREAS, Formerly named "Frawley Circle", the traffic circle located at 5th Avenue and 110th Street in Harlem, New York, was renamed "Duke Ellington Circle" in 1995; in 1997, a 25 foot (7.6 m) tall statue by sculptor Robert Graham of Duke Ellington was erected in the middle of the amphitheater composing the circle; and

WHEREAS, In 1986 a dramatic, stamp-image portrayal of the beloved American composer and bandleader Duke Ellington was designed by Texas-born artist James Sharpe, and its April 1986 release not only represented the first U.S. Postal Service issue of a jazz-themed image, but

the introduction of its design also served as only the second U.S. stamp-image to feature an African-American from the field of musical arts; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, the honor was bestowed on Duke Ellington once again with the issuance of another U.S. Postage Stamp titled "Black Cinema USA 42" for his film "Black and Tan"; and

WHEREAS, On February 24, 2009, the United States Mint launched a new coin featuring Duke Ellington, making him the first African-American to appear alone on a circulating United States coin; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 112th Birthday of Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington, a legendary musician and one of the most influential African-Americans in the history this state, this country, and the world; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington.