

2021-K624

Assembly Resolution No. 624

BY: M. of A. Zinerman

COMMEMORATING the 50th Anniversary of The Billie Holiday Theatre in the Brooklyn community of Bedford-Stuyvesant

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to honor and pay tribute to those cultural institutions and organizations whose commitment to promoting the richness and diversity of the arts and entertainment world has contributed to the strength, vitality, and cultural enrichment of their communities and the great State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of The Billie Holiday Theatre in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, in conjunction with the 50th Anniversary of the "Lady Sings the Blues"; and

WHEREAS, The 1972 American biographical film celebrates the essence of Billie Holiday, one of America's most loved and memorable blues singers, and was captured brilliantly in a tour-de-force debut performance by singer Diana Ross; filled with the greatest songs of the incomparable "Lady Day," the film received five Academy Award nominations, including Diana Ross for Best Actress; alongside her was an extraordinary cast which included Billie Dee Williams and Richard Pryor; and

WHEREAS, The Billie Holiday Theatre, Inc. (BHT) was founded in 1972, by the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (Restoration), a community development corporation whose mission is to be a catalyst for the progressive improvement of the quality of life for its residents; and

WHEREAS, For the last five decades, The Billie Holiday Theatre has served as a platform for world class art rooted in racial justice in the heart of Bedford, producing, presenting, and commissioning new and classic works and festivals in theater, dance, music, visual arts, and film; and

WHEREAS, This AUDELCO and Obie Award-winning Theatre also provides artistic and institutional residencies and offers educational programming to people of all ages; and

WHEREAS, In 1981, The Billie Holiday Theatre made history when it transferred the hit play Incent Black to Broadway with 50 percent of the financing being derived from the Black community, a first in the theatre world; and

WHEREAS, Many of today's most successful actors, writers, designers, and musicians got their start at The Billie Holiday Theatre, including Samuel L. Jackson, Debbie Allen, Tichina Arnold, Bill Cobbs, Phyllis Yvonne Stickney, Carol Woods, Elaine Graham and Ebony JoAnn; and

WHEREAS, The great political satirist/comic, Dick Gregory made his theatrical comeback after 20 years on the stage, and audiences were treated to the reunion of "Good Times" stars Ralph Carter and John Amos; and

WHEREAS, William "Smokey" Robinson's first musical, Raisin' Hell and

plays by Samm Art Williams, Weldon Irvine, and John Henry Redwood were produced at The Billie Holiday Theatre; and

WHEREAS, In addition, musicians Victor Willis and Alex Briley met and performed at the Theatre prior to forming The Village People, and Grammy Award winning bassist and producer Marcus Miller performed in the venue's pit band; and

WHEREAS, Today, under the luminous direction of Board Chair Wayne Winborne and his fellow Directors, this extraordinary cultural institution serves as a premier entertainment center in New York City, the hub of Bedford-Stuyvesant, and a true beacon for the arts which are so vital to the community and the lives of its residents and visitors; and

WHEREAS, A vibrant arts community encourages collaboration, instills local pride, draws people together, and is essential to a community's vitality; since its inception, The Billie Holiday Theatre has greatly contributed to the richness of New York's cultural palette and remains steadfastly dedicated to ensuring this gem remains in all its glory for decades to come; and

WHEREAS, The arts are the building blocks of civilization; they are central to human expression; they enlighten us and inspire the imagination; educational institutions, individuals, and organizations which further such worthy purposes richly merit the recognition and appreciation of this Legislative Body and the people of the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, As The Billie Holiday Theatre looks back with great pride to its beginnings, viewing, with just satisfaction, its successful evolution, it renews both its dedication to supporting artistic

excellence, and its commitment to the community it has served since 1972, expressing its appreciation to all those who have helped to sustain and enhance it over the years; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of The Billie Holiday Theatre in the Brooklyn community of Bedford-Stuyvesant; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Wayne Winborne, Board Chair, The Billie Holiday Theatre.