

BY: Senator CLEARE

MOURNING the death of legendary sax player, Sonny Rollins, one of the most important and influential jazz musicians in the history of American music

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to honor and pay tribute to those musical geniuses whose commitment and creative talents have contributed to the entertainment and cultural enrichment of their community, the State of New York, the Nation and the world; and

WHEREAS, It is with profound sorrow and deep regret that this Legislative Body mourn the death of legendary sax player, Sonny Rollins, one of the most important and influential jazz musicians in the history of American music, noting the significance of his inspired life and accomplishments; and

WHEREAS, Sonny Rollins, whose forceful and imaginative approach to the tenor saxophone made him one of the dominant jazz musicians of the post-World War II era, died at his home in Woodstock, New York, on Monday May 25, 2026, at the age of 95; and

WHEREAS, Walter Theodore "Sonny" Rollins was born on September 7, 1930 in New York City to parents from the Virgin Islands; and

WHEREAS, The youngest of three siblings, Sonny Rollins grew up in central Harlem and on Sugar Hill, not far from the Savoy Ballroom, the Apollo Theatre, and the doorstep of his idol, Coleman Hawkins; receiving his first alto saxophone at the age of seven or eight, he was inspired by Louis Jordan, Fats Waller and Louis Armstrong; and

WHEREAS, Sonny Rollins switched to tenor saxophone in 1946 at the age of 16 to emulate Coleman Hawkins; and

WHEREAS, During his high-school years, Sonny Rollins played in a band with other future jazz legends Jackie McLean, Kenny Drew, and Art Taylor; and

WHEREAS, Sonny Rollins attended Edward W. Stitt Junior High School and graduated from Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem in 1948; and

WHEREAS, While living in Sugar Hill in the early 1950's, Sonny Rollins established a reputation first among musicians, then the public, as the most brash and creative young tenor on the scene, through his work and recordings with Babs Gonzales, J.J. Johnson, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis; and

WHEREAS, In 1956, after returning from a brief move to Chicago, Sonny Rollins began recording the first of a series of landmark recordings issued under his own name: "Valse Hot" introduced the

practice, now common, of playing bop in 3/4 meter; "St. Thomas" initiated his explorations of calypso patterns; and "Blue 7" was hailed by Gunther Schuller as demonstrating a new manner of "thematic improvisation," in which the soloist develops motifs extracted from his theme; and

WHEREAS, Sonny Rollins' 1956 album "Saxophone Colossus" was selected for preservation by the National Recording Registry of the Library of Congress in 2016; and

WHEREAS, During the years 1956 to 1958, Sonny Rollins was widely regarded as the most talented and innovative tenor saxophonist in jazz, and his first examples of the unaccompanied solo playing that would become a specialty also appeared in this period; yet the perpetually dissatisfied saxophonist questioned the acclaim his music was attracting, and between 1959 and late 1961, he withdrew from public performance; and

WHEREAS, Sonny Rollins returned to action in late 1961, his first recording was appropriately titled "The Bridge" and by the mid-60s, his live sets became grand, marathon stream-of-consciousness solos where he would call forth melodies from his encyclopedic knowledge of popular songs, including startling segues and sometimes barely visiting one theme before surging into dazzling variations upon the next; and

WHEREAS, The period between 1962 and 1966 saw Sonny Rollins working and striking productive relationships with Jim Hall, Don Cherry, Paul Bley, and his idol Coleman Hawkins, yet he grew dissatisfied with the music business once again and started yet another sabbatical in 1966; and

WHEREAS, In 1965, Sonny Rollins married Lucille Pearson, in Kansas City, Missouri; and

WHEREAS, In 1972, with the encouragement and support of his wife Lucille, who had become his business manager, Rollins returned to performing and recording, signing with Milestone and releasing "Next Album"; and

WHEREAS, Sonny Rollins' lengthy association with the Berkeley-based label, Milestone, produced two dozen albums in various settings—from his working groups to all-star ensembles (Tommy Flanagan, Jack DeJohnette, Stanley Clarke, Tony Williams); from a solo recital to tour recordings with the Milestone Jazzstars (Ron Carter, McCoy Tyner); and

WHEREAS, After decades of innovating and influencing Jazz music, Sonny Rollins won his first performance Grammy for "This Is What I Do" in 2000, and his second for 2004's "Without a Song"; and

WHEREAS, Sonny Rollins received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences in 2004, was inducted into the Academy of Achievement in June 2006, was awarded the Austrian Cross of Honor for Science and Art, First Class, in November 2009, became one of 229 leaders in the sciences, social sciences,

humanities, arts, business, and public affairs who have been elected members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences on the eve of his 80th Birthday in 2010, became the first jazz composer to be named the Edward MacDowell Medalist in August 2010, and on March 2, 2011, Sonny Rollins received the Medal of Arts, the Nation's highest honor for artistic excellence, from President Barack Obama in a White House ceremony; and

WHEREAS, Sonny Rollins would play his last public performance in 2012, and move to Woodstock, New York in 2013; and

WHEREAS, Sonny Rollins is predeceased by his wife Lucille who passed away in 2004; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit, imbued with a sense of compassion, and an unparalleled talent that transcended generations, Sonny Rollins leaves behind a legacy which will long endure the passage of time and will remain an inspiration to all future musicians and everyone his music touched; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of legendary sax player, Sonny Rollins, one of the most important and influential jazz musicians in the history of American music; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Sonny Rollins.