

A RESOLUTION
NO. _____

WHEREAS, Often called the “Mother of the Blues,” Ma Rainey was known for her deep-throated voice and mesmerizing stage presence that drew packed audiences and sold hit records in the early twentieth century. Also a songwriter, her lyrics and melodies reflected her experiences as an independent, openly bisexual African-American woman;

WHEREAS, Ma Rainey was born Gertrude Malissa Nix Pridgett in Columbus, Georgia, on April 26, 1886. Her parents, Thomas and Ella (Allen) Pridgett, were minstrel performers, and Rainey displayed a talent for singing at a young age and began performing as a teenager. She made her debut with the Bunch of Blackberries revue at the Springer Opera House in Columbus. She then began singing with traveling vaudeville acts in tent shows, honky-tonks, and carnivals;

WHEREAS, Rainey, the “Mother of the Blues,” was influential for bridging the traditions of vaudeville and authentic Southern blues. The blues descended from the call-and-response storytelling songs of West Africa. Captive Africans passed them down through the generations while enslaved in the Western Hemisphere. Rainey’s strong voice and style of singing also fueled her success. A vibrant stage presence, she was known for her gold teeth, flashy clothing and jewelry, and establishing a personal connection with her audiences;

WHEREAS, Rainey’s cultural legacy is profound. She was a mentor to the legendary blues singer Bessie Smith. Rainey is credited with inspiring later singers including Dinah Washington, Big Mama Thornton, and Janis Joplin. Her story inspired famed playwright August Wilson’s 1982 play, Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom, which takes its title from Rainey’s 1927 song of the same name (which in turn refers to the black bottom dance trend of the 1920s). The play was a Broadway success and was recently adapted as a film;

WHEREAS After a long career of touring and over 100 recordings with Paramount, Ma Rainey moved to her 5th Avenue home in Columbus in the early 1930’s to retire. She was inducted into several halls of fame including the Blues Foundation’s Hall of Fame in 1983, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990, the Georgia Music Hall of Fame in 1992, and the Georgia Women of Achievement in 1993. She was commemorated by the U.S. Postal Service for her achievements in 1994 with a stamp in her honor.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE COUNCIL OF COLUMBUS, GEORGIA HEREBY RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:

This Council celebrates the legacy of Ma Rainey and her contributions to music.

Introduced at a regular meeting of the Council of Columbus, Georgia, held the 24 day of January, 2023 and adopted at said meeting by the affirmative vote of _____ members of said Council.

- Councilor Allen voting _____
- Councilor Barnes voting _____
- Councilor Cogel voting _____
- Councilor Crabb voting _____
- Councilor Davis voting _____
- Councilor Garrett voting _____
- Councilor House voting _____
- Councilor Huff voting _____
- Councilor Thomas voting _____
- Councilor Tucker voting _____

SANDRA T. DAVIS,
CLERK OF COUNCIL

B.H. "SKIP" HENDERSON III,
MAYOR