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# SENATE RESOLUTION

RECOGNIZING MEKIA KEALAKAI'S BIRTHDAY OF OCTOBER 15 AS ROYAL  
HAWAIIAN TROUBADOURS DAY.

1           WHEREAS, at the dawn of the twentieth century, Hawaiian  
2 string bands tirelessly travelled the circuit of world fairs,  
3 chautauquas, and vaudeville, playing the largest venues of their  
4 day; and

5  
6           WHEREAS, they spread a new Hawaiian style of string driven  
7 ensemble music featuring a synthesis of string, brass, and reed  
8 instruments all played with a virtuosity that has defined and  
9 influenced much of what is now considered to be quintessentially  
10 "American" music; and

11  
12           WHEREAS, the musical innovations of this generation include  
13 two of the most iconic stringed instruments of the modern era,  
14 the Martin Dreadnought acoustic guitar and the Fender  
15 Stratocaster electric guitar; and

16  
17           WHEREAS, after several years of research drawn from public  
18 and private archives, historical societies, personal  
19 correspondence, recordings, oral histories, and collaboration  
20 with the C.F. Martin Guitar Company, groundbreaking research has  
21 surfaced on the life story of Mekia Kealakai, a Native Hawaiian  
22 born into poverty who was the son of a sergeant major in the  
23 Royal Guard; and

24  
25           WHEREAS, like many at-risk youth today, Kealakai found  
26 himself in a reform school for juvenile delinquents at the age  
27 of twelve; and

28  
29           WHEREAS, what could have led to a lifetime of trouble,  
30 instead became a life-changing opportunity through the  
31 mentorship of Royal Hawaiian Band leader Henri Berger, who  
32 introduced him to music; and

33  
34           WHEREAS, as he studied legendary composers in the western  
35 classical tradition, Kealakai became an accomplished student of  
36 theory, harmony, and composition, fusing the Western classical



1 repertoire with the cosmopolitan traditions of his hometown  
2 Honolulu and creating a new Hawaiian ensemble style along with  
3 his band mates; and  
4

5 WHEREAS, faced with uncertain political times, Kealakai and  
6 musicians of his generation left the islands to share their  
7 unique Hawaiian string band music with audiences throughout the  
8 continental United States and around the world, in time becoming  
9 internationally renowned ambassadors of Hawaiian culture and  
10 music; and  
11

12 WHEREAS, playing to audiences of ever-increasing size,  
13 without the aid of amplification, these young Hawaiian musicians  
14 found themselves at the leading edge of innovation in guitar  
15 design that came to define the sound of modern popular music;  
16 and  
17

18 WHEREAS, Kealakai began collaborating with the C.F. Martin  
19 Guitar Company, the leading manufacturer of acoustic guitars at  
20 the time, and requested they make an extra-large jumbo guitar;  
21 and  
22

23 WHEREAS, that Kealakai model would later become known as  
24 the Dreadnought guitar - the guitar of choice for such icons as  
25 Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Gabby Pahinui, the Beatles, and Bob  
26 Marley, to name but a few; and  
27

28 WHEREAS, so far in 2020, the Kealakai Center for Pacific  
29 Strings has presented four sold out Sovereign String Band  
30 concerts featuring award winning Hawaiian musicians Aaron Mahi,  
31 Raiatea Helm, and Jeff Peterson, joined by premier artists from  
32 the worlds of classical and opera to bring this historic legacy  
33 to life before contemporary audiences; and  
34

35 WHEREAS, the Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings has  
36 released a compact disc in collaboration with the Library of  
37 Congress of historic Hawaiian string band music from 1904, and  
38 is currently curating a major exhibition for the Bishop Museum,  
39 opening in Spring 2020; and  
40



# S.R. NO. 100

1 WHEREAS, recognition of the Royal Hawaiian Troubadour  
 2 generation and their seminal contributions to the musical arts  
 3 is long overdue; now, therefore,

4  
 5 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirtieth Legislature  
 6 of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2020, that Mekia  
 7 Kealakai's birthday of October 15 shall become recognized as  
 8 Royal Hawaiian Troubadours Day; and

9  
 10 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this  
 11 Resolution be transmitted to the President of the Pu'uhonua  
 12 Society, Chief Executive Officer of Bishop Museum, and Hawaii  
 13 State Comptroller.

14  
 15  
 16

OFFERED BY:

*Ruell E. Fols*  
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