SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, what could have led to a lifetime of trouble, instead became a life-changing opportunity through the mentorship of Royal Hawaiian Band leader Henri Berger, who introduced him to music; and
WHEREAS, as he studied legendary composers in the western
classical tradition, Kealakai became an accomplished student of
theory, harmony, and composition, fusing the Western classical
repertoire with the cosmopolitan traditions of his hometown
Honolulu and creating a new Hawaiian ensemble style along with
his band mates; and

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, the Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings has
released a compact disc in collaboration with the Library of
Congress of historic Hawaiian string band music from 1904, and
is currently curating a major exhibition for the Bishop Museum,
opening in Spring 2020; and
WHEREAS, recognition of the Royal Hawaiian Troubadour
generation and their seminal contributions to the musical arts
is long overdue; now, therefore,

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this
Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the President of the
Puʻuhonua Society, Chief Executive Officer of Bishop Museum, and
Hawaii State Comptroller.

OFFERED BY:

[Signatures]

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