

ENROLLED ORIGINAL

A CEREMONIAL RESOLUTION

24-97

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

November 2, 2021

To recognize and honor Baba Melvin Deal, for 62 years of dedication and service to the District of Columbia and Ward 8 Community as Black culture educator and founder of the African Heritage Dancers and Drummers.

WHEREAS, on January 2, 1943, Melvin Eugene Deal was born in Washington, DC, a first-generation Washingtonian;

WHEREAS, in 1959, Melvin Deal, started dancing at age 15;

WHEREAS, Melvin Deal, graduated from Eastern High School and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Arts and Education from Howard University in 1966;

WHEREAS, Melvin Deal studied at Ghana University, University of Nigeria at Ibadan, and numerous cultural institutions nationally and abroad in the African Diaspora;

WHEREAS, in 1968, Melvin Deal was the Founding Executive Artistic Director of the African Heritage Dancers and Drummers with a mission to engage, inspire and pay tribute to youth, community and ancestors;

WHEREAS, the African Heritage Dancers became one of the first Black performing arts companies in the District of Columbia with students from the community and performers from around the world;

WHEREAS, in 1973, the African Heritage Dancers and Drummers was incorporated in the District of Columbia and has its studio located at 1320 Good Hope Road, S.E. in Ward 8;

WHEREAS, the African Heritage Dancers and Drummers counted at-risk youth among its students, many whom credited Melvin Deal for changing the direction of their lives;

WHEREAS, Melvin Deal was a founding instructor at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and held residencies at all the major universities in the District of Columbia;

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WHEREAS, Melvin Deal contributed to motivational programs with the Robinson Research Institute, the National Association of Social Workers, the National Association of Black Psychologists, and the Office of Criminal Justice;

WHEREAS, when Melvin Deal became an elder he was bestowed with the title, Baba, which is a West African term that means father and is an honored title designated for male elders in the United States African dance communities;

WHEREAS, Baba Melvin Deal was a significant contributor and honored elder at the annual Dance Africa Festival at Dance Place dance school in the Brookland/ Edgewood neighborhood in Washington, DC;

WHEREAS, Baba Melvin Deal was the recipient of many prestigious awards, including: the 'Living Legends Award' in 1981, the 'Washingtonian of the Year Award' in 1981, the 'Mayor's Arts Award' in 1981, and in 1995, Baltimore's 'Great Blacks in Wax Award' and Philadelphia's 'CODUND' award;

WHEREAS, Baba Melvin Deal was a veteran artist who worked tirelessly in researching African culture and how it could be used to build self-esteem in youth, combat dysfunctional lifestyles, and to address the presence of violence and abuse in African American communities;

WHEREAS, in 1968, Baba Melvin Deal was credited with performing the first Kwanzaa ceremony and celebration and has served as community priest at African celebrations and spiritual services;

WHEREAS, Baba Melvin Deal toured nationally with the African Heritage Dancers and Drummers, and internationally to Haiti and Mexico;

WHEREAS, Baba Melvin Deal presented colorful and insightful dance performances on AIDS awareness, healing, and prevention;

WHEREAS, Baba Melvin Deal served as the MLK Holiday DC 2021 grand marshal;

WHEREAS, Baba Melvin Deal was an educator, performer, choreographer, director, humanitarian, philosopher, musician, cultural anthropologist, ethno-musicologist, and community activist who contributed a lifetime working with schools, community organizations, churches, youth, seniors;

WHEREAS, on September 22, 2021, Baba Melvin Deal died at age 78;
WHEREAS, Baba Melvin Deal once said, "The drum is the centerpiece that connects the spiritual world and physical world, that allows the voice of God to speak to the people".

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RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the “Baba Melvin Deal Posthumous Memorial Recognition Resolution of 2021.”

Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia posthumously recognizes and honors the life of Baba Melvin Deal for his outstanding career and contributions to residents of the District of Columbia and Ward 8.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall take effect immediately.