

Regular Session, 2014

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 180

BY REPRESENTATIVE BURRELL AND SENATOR PEACOCK

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To celebrate the life and accomplishments of Harvey LaVan Cliburn, Jr., and to express the sincere and heartfelt condolences of the Legislature of Louisiana upon his passing.

WHEREAS, it is with deep regret and profound sorrow that members of the Louisiana Legislature learned of the death of Harvey "Van" LaVan Cliburn, Jr., on February 27, 2013, at the age of seventy-eight years; and

WHEREAS, Van Cliburn, a true Louisiana hero and one of the greatest pianists in the history of music, was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, on July 12, 1934, to the late Harvey LaVan Cliburn, Sr., and Sirilda "Rildia" Bee O'Bryan Cliburn; and

WHEREAS, Rildia, an accomplished piano player in her own right and a piano teacher in Shreveport, realized that her son Van, at a very early age had a promising talent for the piano, often recalling fondly of Van at the age of three, following a piano lesson with one of her students, going almost immediately to the piano after her pupil left, and playing, by ear, the very musical piece that she had earlier used in teaching her older student; and

WHEREAS, recognizing his artistic potential, she began piano lessons with him and continued as his only piano teacher until he was seventeen years of age, and it was during his early formative years as a young pianist in his home town of Shreveport that he first performed piano recitals in the auditorium at the Louisiana State Exhibit Museum; and

WHEREAS, he spoke with affectionate respect for his mother's excellence as a teacher and attributed the lyrical elegance of his playing to her by saying that, "My mother had a gorgeous singing voice, she always told me that the first instrument is the human voice. When you are playing the piano, it is not digital. You must find a singing sound-the 'eye of the sound', she called it."; and

WHEREAS, under the tutelage of his mother, he continued to develop, and at the age of twelve, he won a statewide piano competition that enabled him to debut with the Houston Symphony Orchestra, and at age seventeen, Van entered The Juilliard School in New York

City, and at the young age of twenty, won the Levintritt Competition, which had not awarded a first-place prize since 1949 and which earned him debuts with such major orchestras as Cleveland, Denver, Indianapolis, and Pittsburgh, as well as a coveted New York Philharmonic debut with the great Dimitri Mitropoulos, which took place in Carnegie Hall on November 14, 1954; and

WHEREAS, those early experiences would provide a very strong stage presence and challenge for the young and talented Van Cliburn that would ultimately lead to international fame beginning in 1958, when Van traveled behind the Iron Curtain to Moscow, USSR to compete in the first Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition and with the aspirations of a nation on his shoulders, he emerged as the gold medal winner against all odds and sealing his legacy as one of the most persuasive ambassadors of American culture, as well as one of the greatest pianists in the history of music; and

WHEREAS, Van Cliburn being blessed as a naturally gifted pianist whose enormous hands had an uncommonly wide span which he used to develop a commanding technique, cultivated an exceptionally warm tone and manifested deep musical sensitivity and at its best, his playing had a surging romantic fervor, but one leavened by an unsentimental restraint that seemed peculiarly American which led the towering Russian pianist Sviatoslav Richter, a juror for the competition, to describe Van Cliburn as a genius—a word, he added, "I do not use lightly about performers."; and

WHEREAS, following the competition, he triumphantly returned to the United States to a ticker tape parade in New York City, the first ever ticker tape celebration for a classical musician, and the first for a native son of Louisiana which led to the then Mayor of Shreveport, Robert R. Wagner, proclaiming at a ceremony at the Shreveport City Hall that, "With his two hands, Van Cliburn struck a chord which has resounded around the world, raising our prestige with artists and music lovers everywhere."; and

WHEREAS, with his historic 1958 victory at the first International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, at the height of the Cold War, Van Cliburn tore down cultural barriers years ahead of glasnost and perestroika, transcending politics by demonstrating the universality of classical music and as a world renowned pianist, Louisiana's own Van Cliburn continued to experience great popularity in the years that followed and proudly

performed for royalty, heads of state in Europe, Asia, and South America, and for every president of the United States since Harry Truman; and

WHEREAS, ever mindful of his Louisiana heritage, Van Cliburn returned again to Louisiana in 2006, and appeared as a Pennington Great Performers Series Artist with the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra; and

WHEREAS, throughout his career, Van Cliburn was awarded numerous awards such as the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, Kennedy Center Honors in 2001, the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President George W. Bush in 2003, the Russian Order of Friendship from President Vladimir Putin in October 2004, and most recently in 2011, he was awarded the National Medal of Arts by President Barack Obama, and it should be recognized that the three national awards presented by the presidents of the United States of America and Russia are the highest civilian awards presented by both countries; and

WHEREAS, upon his death, *The Wall Street Journal*, when reporting on his death stated that Van Cliburn was a "cultural hero" who "rocketed to unheard-of stardom for a classical musician in the U.S." and went on to call him "the rare classical musician to enjoy rock star status"; and

WHEREAS, upon his death the state of Louisiana lost one of its finest sons and because of his numerous accomplishments the passing of Harvey "Van" LaVan Cliburn, Jr., leaves a void in the community and creates a genuine sense of profound sorrow with his friends and family; and

WHEREAS, the memory of Harvey "Van" LaVan Cliburn, Jr, will remain eternal in the hearts and minds of his family, friends, and all of those who knew and loved him.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby celebrate the life and accomplishments of Harvey LaVan Cliburn, Jr., and expresses its sincere and heartfelt condolences upon his death.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a suitable copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the family of Harvey LaVan Cliburn, Jr.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE