

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 133

By Clemmons

A RESOLUTION to honor the Exit/In upon the occasion of the venue's fiftieth anniversary.

WHEREAS, independent music venues are the lifeblood of their communities, providing a space for local and independent artists to take the stage and an atmosphere devoted to artistic expression and musical communion; and

WHEREAS, one such venue is the legendary Exit/In, which opened its doors half a century ago on Elliston Place in Nashville; since that time, it has played a singular role in contributing to the cultural current of the now-thriving Music City; and

WHEREAS, the venue's inception harkens back to 1970, when Brugh Reynolds met his high school friend Owsley Manier at the long-gone local watering hole Bishop's American Pub; fresh off a stint with the U.S. Army, Mr. Manier had roamed Atlanta's musical haunts while stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia; and

WHEREAS, it was in Atlanta that Owsley Manier had stumbled upon the Bottom of the Barrel, a club that featured a bar with a separate listening room where patrons remained silent in seeming reverence for the musical performances; with this inspiration in mind, Mr. Manier and Mr. Reynolds sealed the deal with a handshake and cashed out their life insurance policies for start-up money; and

WHEREAS, the two opened Exit/In in 1971 at 2208 Elliston Place in a building that formerly housed a film distribution company; the name of the venue came to Mr. Manier after an arduous day of working on a plywood stage, inspired by the building's back door and loading dock that would be used as the main entrance; and

WHEREAS, at that time, the concept of a listening room was foreign to Nashville; in fact, the Nashville of that era was not known for live music. The Exit/In, which predated the world-

famous Blue Bird Café by more than a decade, was established only four years after it became legal to sell liquor by the drink in Davidson County, so the staples of Nashville nightlife remained restaurants and movie theaters; and

WHEREAS, the original Exit/In had a capacity of seventy-five and only two house rules: no fighting and no talking during performances; a year after its opening, the venue expanded to a capacity of around 200 by leasing the building next door, which previously served as a pinball factory. The venue's final expansion came in the 1980s, when it grew to accommodate 500 patrons; and

WHEREAS, within its first two years, Exit/In showcased traditional folk, Memphis blues, Kentucky bluegrass, bebop, jazz, gospel, Southern rock, outlaw country, and comedy to an ever-changing audience; the venue made a significant contribution to the growing interest in Black music from Nashville's predominantly white culture and was the city's only white-owned integrated club at the time; and

WHEREAS, Exit/In had a mission to provide a stage for small local and touring acts; by hosting two shows per night, the venue provided many up-and-coming bands and songwriters the chance to be heard, and as the venue's reputation grew, music-industry gatekeepers caught on and started paying attention to who was on the bill; and

WHEREAS, such was its commitment to the growing counterculture music scene in Nashville that, in 1975, Exit/In was nominated by *Performance* magazine as Club of the Year; and

WHEREAS, sadly, in 1976, only five years after opening Exit/In, original owners Owsley Manier and Brugh Reynolds were forced into bankruptcy, and Nick Spiva and Vianda Hill took over as owners; and

WHEREAS, ownership changed once more, with restaurateur Wayne Oldham, country rocker Charlie Daniels, and future Tennessee Performing Arts Center president Steve Greil

spending \$300,000 on a massive renovation and expansion that turned Exit/In into what everyone recognizes today; and

WHEREAS, under these owners, a grand re-opening was held in September 1980, featuring the legendary Chuck Berry; in December of that same year, Radio Luxembourg, then the world's largest commercial radio station, broadcast a live concert from the Exit/In featuring Bobby Bare, beaming it to as many as four million people throughout the United Kingdom, Europe, Western Russia, and North Africa; and

WHEREAS, despite the enthusiasm and fanfare, the Exit/In closed a mere five months later in February 1981; three years later, however, it served as host of Music City's first official "in the round" singer/songwriter performance, which took place during the filming of the television show *Nashville Skyline*. Guy Clark, Rodney Crowell, and Vince Gill were one of many threesomes to perform for this series; and

WHEREAS, since its opening, Exit/In has remained at its original address on Elliston Place, which had been a popular commercial corridor by 1930, with Elliston Place Soda Shop opening in 1939; along with other area establishments, including The End, TGI Friday's, Obie's Pizza, The Gold Rush, and Mosko's, the Exit/In shaped Elliston Place's legacy as Nashville's counterculture epicenter, such that, in the 1980s, the area earned the moniker "The Rock Block" and in 2020 was duly honored with a historical marker; and

WHEREAS, in 1994, Rock Block hall of famer Bruce Fitzpatrick became an owner of Exit/In, followed by a change of hands in 1997 to Ned Horton, who established the venue's now-trademark Wall of Fame; the following year, Billy Block's Western Beat relocated to the Exit/In, beginning an eight-year tenure just as the Americana boom began in Nashville and across the country; and

WHEREAS, country and Americana's biggest stars continually graced the stage over the years, including Emmylou Harris, who filmed her Spyboy concert for DVD release at the venue in 1998; and

WHEREAS, world-famous rockers Kings of Leon played the venue in 2005, leaving their names on the Wall of Fame, and country crooner Keith Urban held a surprise performance at the venue in 2018, previewing his new album and tour, both called *Graffiti U*, which was a throwback to his days of playing the Exit/In in the late 1990s; and

WHEREAS, the Exit/In has also presented the likes of Etta James, Johnny Cash, Linda Ronstadt, Talking Heads, Billy Joel, Muddy Waters, Leonard Cohen, Willie Nelson, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, Lucinda Williams, The Allman Brothers Band, Cage the Elephant, and REM, to name but a few of the tens of thousands of acts that have graced the stage and now grace the venue's iconic Wall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, ownership of Exit/In changed hands once again in 2006, with Josh Billue taking over; six years later, Chris Cobb became an owner, and in 2019, Mr. Cobb became the club's sole owner, in which capacity he continues to serve; and

WHEREAS, the venue has been featured and commemorated on various occasions: part of Robert Altman's 1975 *Nashville* was filmed at the Exit/In, including the scene in which Keith Carradine sings the Oscar-winning "I'm Easy"; Steve Martin mentions the club in his memoir, *Born Standing Up*; and Sting appears on the back cover of The Police's *Zenyatta Mondatta* in an Exit/In tee-shirt he acquired while playing the venue one year before the group's first U.S. tour; and

WHEREAS, though the pandemic year of 2020 dealt a crushing blow to all aspects of the music industry, purveyors and patrons alike are hopeful that soon the Exit/In will start rocking the Rock Block once again; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the Exit/In upon the occasion of the legendary venue's fiftieth anniversary, extending our best wishes for much continued success.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.