



Legislation Details (With Text)

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**File created:** 4/21/2009    **In control:** City Council  
**On agenda:**    **Final action:** 4/21/2009  
**Enactment date:**    **Enactment #:**

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**Title:** THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Council of the City of Pittsburgh does hereby commemorate the 50th anniversary of her death and thank Billie Holiday for providing us with a body of work, as great as any vocalist before or since.

**Sponsors:** Bruce A. Kraus, All Members

**Indexes:** PROCLAMATION - MR. KRAUS

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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
4/21/2009	1	City Council	Adopted	Pass

**WHEREAS**, Eleanora Fagan was born in 1915, and spent much of her young life, in Baltimore, Maryland, before moving, with her mother, to Harlem at the age of 12 and it was in Harlem that Eleanora's singing talent was discovered and she adopted the stage name, **Billie Holiday**; and

**WHEREAS**, desperate for money, **Billie Holiday** looked for work as a dancer in a Harlem speakeasy. When there was no opening for a dancer she auditioned as a singer, wowed the owner and found herself singing at the popular Pod and Jerry's Log Cabin; and

**WHEREAS**, even with no technical training, **Billie Holiday** was soon singing in a number of Harlem jazz clubs and became an active participant in what was then one of the most vibrant jazz scenes in America; and

**WHEREAS**, at the age of twenty, her first big break came when the well-connected jazz writer and producer John Hammond heard her fill in for a better known performer and reported that she was the greatest singer he had ever heard. Her bluesy vocal style brought a slow and rough quality to the jazz standards, of the time, and by slowing the tone with emotive vocals that reset the timing and rhythm, she added a new dimension to jazz singing; and

**WHEREAS**, with the support of Hammond, **Billie Holiday** spent much of the 1930s working with great jazz musicians, including Benny Goodman, Teddy Wilson, Duke Ellington, Ben Webster and Lester Young; and

**WHEREAS**, it was together with Lester Young that **Billie Holiday** would create some of the greatest jazz recordings of all time. They were close friends throughout their lives - giving each other their now-famous nicknames of "Lady Day and the "Prez". Sympathetic to her unique style, Young helped her create music that would best highlight her unconventional talents; and

**WHEREAS**, *Lady in Satin* was Billie Holiday's final album and was released in June of 1958 on Columbia Records. It is the final album completed by the singer and released in her lifetime. Ray Ellis said of the album

in 1997:

*I would say that the most emotional moment was her listening to the playback of "I'm a Fool to Want You". There were tears in her eyes...After we finished the album I went into the control room and listened to all the takes. I must admit I was unhappy with her performance, but I was just listening musically instead of emotionally. It wasn't until I heard the final mix a few weeks later that I realized how great her performance really was.; and*

**WHEREAS**, by the late 1940's, after the death of her mother, Holiday's heroin addiction became so bad she was repeatedly arrested; by 1950, the authorities denied her a license to perform in establishments selling alcohol and over the next several years she would slip deeper into alcoholism; tragically, **Billie Holiday** died on April 7, 1959, at the age of 44, following the death of her good friend Lester Young and with almost nothing to her name; and

**WHEREAS**, though she was plagued by health problems, bad relationships and addiction, **Billie Holiday**, continued to fight racism and sexism and remained an unequalled performer throughout her lifetime.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Council of the City of Pittsburgh does hereby commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death and thank **Billie Holiday** for providing us with a body of work, as great as any vocalist before or since.