

2023-J2590

Senate Resolution No. 2590

BY: Senator PARKER

COMMENDING the Brooklyn Academy of Music upon the occasion of hosting the 2024 DanceAfrica Festival to be celebrated May 24-27, 2024, and paying tribute to this year's Opening Night Honoree, Ms. Amma D. McKen

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to call attention to those events which serve to enhance the cultural enrichment of the State of New York and preserve the heritage of African Americans; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commend the Brooklyn Academy of Music upon the occasion of hosting the 2024 DanceAfrica Festival to be celebrated May 24-27, 2024; and

WHEREAS, Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) is a multi-faceted arts center committed to serving the Brooklyn community; for over 150 years, it has provided world-class programming in theater, dance, music, opera, and film while showcasing the work of emerging artists and innovative modern masters; and

WHEREAS, The 2024 DanceAfrica Festival is hosted by the Brooklyn Academy of Music and is the nation's largest festival dedicated to African diasporic dance and music; it opens Brooklyn's stages to the ancestral history and vital living artistry of Cameroon; and

WHEREAS, Now in its 47th year, DanceAfrica explores the past and present of Central African history, arts, and culture, as symbolized by the calabash, a vessel of mystical, practical, and cultural significance; and

WHEREAS, Brooklyn Academy of Music partners with longtime neighbors, first-time visitors, the DanceAfrica Council of Elders, and our partners at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA) in Brooklyn and The Billie Holiday Theatre (formerly Restoration Arts) to create the nation's largest festival of African dance as well as Brooklyn's unofficial start of the summer season; and

WHEREAS, This year's Honoree, Amma D. McKen, a member of the Council of Elders of DanceAfrica, was born in Brooklyn, New York; she began studying as a singer and dancer under the tutelage of various elders of the tradition and took a holistic and contextual approach to the tradition, learning the genre as both an art form and an aspect of her spiritual practice as a devotee and initiate; and

WHEREAS, Amma D. McKen is the director and co-founder of Omiyesa, a cultural music group established in 1972; she was also a founding member of the International African American Ballet which performed in the 1970s and early 1980s; as a priestess of Yemonja since 1979, she is also a dancer, singer, professional tie-dye artist, clothing and costume designer, natural hair stylist, and owner of Abeokuta Enterprises, an African-inspired apparel company; and

WHEREAS, Amma D. McKen holds several roles and titles in Yoruba tradition and spirituality, including the title of Akpon, a lead singer and officiator for the drumming and dancing celebrations; the Akpon is responsible for teaching the tradition to other practitioners; and

WHEREAS, In 2009, Amma D. McKen was selected as one of the recipients of the nation's highest honor in folk and traditional arts, the National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship, chosen for her artistic excellence and contributions to her artistic traditions; and

WHEREAS, For more than 50 years, Amma D. McKen has added value, knowledge, cultural texture, and spirit to the traditional Yoruba/Lukumi community, earning her the reputation as an elder in the community; and

WHEREAS, The DanceAfrica Festival is a cherished event which provides a uniquely warm and safe environment in which to enjoy the music, dance, arts, crafts, flavors, colors, laughter, and love of the African Diaspora with family and visitors from across the globe; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commend the Brooklyn Academy of Music upon the occasion of hosting the 2024 DanceAfrica Festival to be celebrated May 24-27, 2024, and paying tribute to this year's Opening Night Honoree, Ms. Amma D. McKen; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Brooklyn Academy of Music and Ms. Amma D. McKen.