

DENVER CITY COUNCIL



Proclamation No. 23-1509 Celebrating George Morrison, Sr., "Denver's Godfather of Jazz"

WHEREAS, George Morrison, Sr. was an international star during the 1920s Jazz Age and is one of Colorado's most celebrated violinists and composers; and

WHEREAS, George was born into a musical family and began playing the violin at age two. Young George studied classical violin under University of Colorado Professor Howard Reynolds. Virtuoso violinist Fritz Kresler awarded George with private lessons after hearing him play only once; and

WHEREAS, In his late twenties, George went on to study at Chicago's Columbia Conservatory of Music. He aspired to a career in classical music, but the racism of the time prevented that from becoming a reality. Instead, George turned to a more accepting musical world: jazz; and

WHEREAS, George was the first Black musician signed to Columbia Records. His self-named jazz orchestra toured the U.S. and Europe in the 1920s, where he performed for King George V and Queen Mary. Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Jelly Roll Morton are among the famous musicians who performed with him; and

WHEREAS, In Denver, he opened the Casino Cabaret in Five Points, and his home at 2558 Gilpin Street served as the "inn for the in-crowd," for Black touring musicians who were not allowed to stay in most Denver hotels. In addition, George provided free music lessons to students in his home and volunteered to help in the music programs at the Denver Public Schools located around his neighborhood in Whittier; and

WHEREAS, In early 2022, 13 residents of the Whittier neighborhood, led by Dr. Awon Aturie, came together as the George Morrison, Sr. Park Committee to address historical and contemporary erasure of Black history through the restoration of the interpretive sign and monument highlighting the life and legacy of George Morrison, Sr. in his namesake park; and

WHEREAS, In partnership with the Denver Park Trust, Denver Parks and Recreation, and the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, committee members researched George's background, secured photographs, and restored the original sign and monument which were unreadable due age, weather and vandalism; and

WHEREAS, The Colorado Music Hall of Fame, a nonprofit that celebrates, promotes, and supports Colorado's music community, voted to induct George into its Hall of Fame where he joins more than 50 musicians, music industry professionals, venues, and organizations who have received this honor.

WHEREAS, George's induction into the Colorado Music Hall of Fame and the restoration work in his namesake park will be celebrated on October 17, 2023 from 5:00 – 6:30 pm. The event will be held at George Morrison, Sr. Park at 1600 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, and will be a free and open to the public.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER:

Section 1. That the Council of the City and County of Denver hereby recognizes and honors the induction of George Morrison, Sr. into the Colorado Music Hall of Fame.

Section 2. That the Clerk of the City and County of Denver shall affix the seal of the City and County of Denver to this proclamation and that a copy be transmitted to Simone Ross.

PASSED BY THE COUNCIL October 16, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Simone Ross", written over a horizontal line.

PRESIDENT

