

2009 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 862

Commending the Byrd Theatre on 80 years of cultural and educational services to the Commonwealth.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 13, 2009
Agreed to by the Senate, February 19, 2009

WHEREAS, the 1300-seat Byrd Theatre was built in 1928 in Richmond and named in honor of William Byrd II, one of the founders of Richmond; and

WHEREAS, the Byrd Theatre was designed in the French Empire style by Fred Bishop, a Richmond architect, and was built by Walter Coulter and Charles Somma and decorated by the Brunet Studios of New York; and

WHEREAS, as one of the Grand Movie Palaces in the United States, the Byrd Theatre is one of the nation's finest cinema treasures and today is both a State and National Historic Landmark; unlike many opulent theatres built in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, the Byrd Theatre has survived for 80 years and is largely unaltered in appearance or function; it has operated almost continuously since 1928 as a movie theatre; and

WHEREAS, the first movie shown at the Byrd Theatre on Christmas Eve in 1928 was *Waterfront*, a silent movie with sound added, a comedy starring Dorothy MacKaill and Jack Mulhall, and patrons paid an admissions fee of 25 cents for a matinee and 50 cents for an evening movie; today patrons pay only \$1.99 for admission to a movie; and

WHEREAS, the Byrd Theatre was outfitted with two sound systems, one of which was Vitaphone, a relatively new sound synchronization system commercially developed by Warner Brothers; *The Jazz Singer*, generally acknowledged as the first talking film, was recorded using this system; and

WHEREAS, because a significant number of the films distributed during this era were silent, a Wurlitzer Theatre organ was installed in the Byrd Theatre; in 1953 the original Simplex 35mm standards were replaced by the current Simplex 35mm projectors which are still used today; and

WHEREAS, grand movie palaces such as the Byrd Theatre, designed in the 1920s and 1930s, were reminiscent of the opulent European Opera Houses, and no expense was spared in the Theatre's design and construction, which cost approximately \$900,000, or almost \$11 million by today's monetary standards; and

WHEREAS, in 2004 Ray Dolby, creator of the Dolby sound system, donated a Dolby Digital sound system, which was installed in 2006, giving the Byrd Theatre state-of-the-art sound technology; and

WHEREAS, restored and preserved for cultural and educational purposes and as a vital community resource in 2007, the Byrd Theatre incorporates community events into its programming with movies offered at reasonable prices; and

WHEREAS, the Byrd Theatre is an architectural treasure and the building's interior is adorned with paintings, marbled walls, gold leaf arches, hand-painted murals, a richly appointed mezzanine, some of the original patterned mohair-covered seats, hand-painted alcoves, acrylic and oil cameos and other paintings, a cantilevered balcony, large paintings with Greek mythology themes, and an 18-foot, two-and-a-half ton Czechoslovakian crystal chandelier suspended over the auditorium that contains over 5,000 crystals illuminated by 500 red, blue, green, and amber lights; and

WHEREAS, its style, opulence, longevity, and affordable entertainment have endeared many movie-goers to the Byrd Theatre, a historic landmark, and partnerships with civic, educational, and cultural organizations enable the Theatre to support and design programming for a multicultural community, thereby enriching the quality of life in the City of Richmond; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Byrd Theatre on 80 years of cultural and educational services to the City of Richmond and the people of the Commonwealth; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the President of the Byrd Theatre Foundation as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation of the Foundation's work to preserve the Byrd Theatre and extend its cultural and educational programming throughout the community.

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