

## SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 108

*Celebrating the life of Ralph Edmond Stanley.*

Agreed to by the Senate, January 26, 2017

WHEREAS, Ralph Edmond Stanley of Sandy Ridge, a Grammy-winning musician and one of the founding fathers of American bluegrass music, whose distinctive old-time mountain voice and banjo ballads inspired the next generation of bluegrass and country singers, died on June 23, 2016; and

WHEREAS, a lifelong resident of Dickenson County, Ralph Stanley grew up listening to the Carter Family; his unvarnished mountain music style was firmly rooted in the Appalachian terrain where he was raised and the ardent and unaccompanied style of Primitive Baptist Church; and

WHEREAS, Ralph Stanley came to love music at an early age; his mother, Lucy, taught him to play the banjo, and his father, Lee, was a talented singer who sang old-time songs at home and at church; and

WHEREAS, Ralph Stanley first sang in public at the age of eight, when at church one Sunday he was called to lead the congregation in a Primitive Baptist hymn; he graduated from Ervinton High School in 1945 and served in the United States Army during World War II; and

WHEREAS, with the Grand Ole Opry stars they listened to on the radio as role models, Ralph Stanley and his older brother, Carter, began making music together; Carter Stanley played guitar and sang lead and Ralph Stanley played banjo and sang tenor harmony; and

WHEREAS, in 1946, the brothers formed their first band, the Stanley Brothers and the Clinch Mountain Boys, and joined WCYB's live radio program *Farm and Fun Time* in Bristol, Tennessee, and, in 1947, they made their recording debut; and

WHEREAS, for the next 20 years, the Stanley Brothers and their band became renowned for their otherworldly vocal harmonies and soulful instrumental style, performing a mix of blues, ballads, hymns, and breakdowns, and producing mesmerizing pieces that would become bluegrass standards, such as "Mountain Dew," "Little Maggie," and "Angel Band"; and

WHEREAS, the Stanley Brothers and their band played college campuses, outdoor concerts, and festivals during the folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s, and their only popular chart hit "How Far to Little Rock" was released in 1960, making it to the Top 20 of the Billboard country singles chart; and

WHEREAS, after Carter Stanley's death in 1966, Ralph Stanley continued to lead the Clinch Mountain Boys, taking the group in a more traditional direction, touring continually, recording several albums a year, and maintaining their standing as one of bluegrass's pioneering bands; and

WHEREAS, in 1970, Ralph Stanley began hosting an annual music festival at Smith Ridge; each year, he would close the Hills of Home Bluegrass Festival by singing "The Hills of Home" and reciting a tribute to his late brother; and

WHEREAS, in 1976, Ralph Stanley was awarded an honorary doctorate in music by Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee, and he enjoyed being addressed as "Dr. Ralph" thereafter by his legion of fans; and

WHEREAS, Ralph Stanley garnered more mainstream attention than he ever had before in the 1990s and early 2000s, thanks to collaborative albums with well-known bluegrass and folk musicians and his cameo in the 2000 movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*; and

WHEREAS, a pioneering claw hammer banjoist and riveting singer, Ralph Stanley won a Grammy Award in 2002 for his ghostly rendition of "O Death" that was used in the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*; the movie popularized an arrangement of his famous song, "Man of Constant Sorrow"; and

WHEREAS, Ralph Stanley was inducted into the International Bluegrass Hall of Honor in 1992 and became a member of the Grand Ole Opry in 2000; he received the Living Legend Award from the Library of Congress, a National Medal of Arts, and he was the first artist to be given the Traditional American Music Award by the National Endowment for the Humanities; and

WHEREAS, Ralph Stanley was a pivotal figure in the revival of interest in bluegrass music in recent years, and he inspired the careers of the next generation of bluegrass musicians who had the privilege of playing with him in the Clinch Mountain Boys band including country artists, Ricky Skaggs and Keith Whitley; and

WHEREAS, as a musician, Ralph Stanley always remained true to his roots, and he was one of the last and the purist of the traditional country artists; he preferred to call his music old-time mountain style rather than bluegrass, even though he is considered a pioneer of the genre; and

WHEREAS, Ralph Stanley will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by his wife, Jimmi; children, Lisa, Tonya, Tim, and Ralph, and their families; and a host of other relatives, neighbors,

friends, and former Clinch Mountain Boys; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of Virginia hereby note with great sadness the loss of Ralph Edmond Stanley, a founding father of American bluegrass music renowned for his distinctive old-time mountain voice and banjo picking style; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Ralph Edmond Stanley as an expression of the Senate of Virginia's respect for his memory.