

Legislation Text

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Honoring and Recognizing Philadelphia's Kùlú Mèlé African Dance & Drum Ensemble on its 50th Anniversary.

WHEREAS, On September 4, 2019, Kùlú Mèlé African Dance & Drum Ensemble (Kùlú Mèlé) celebrated its 50th Anniversary. The celebration of this historic event continues with the world premiere of their new spellbinding production, *Ogun & the People*, on Saturday, November 30, at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts and the launch reception of its new commemorative book, *Kùlú Mèlé's Ogun & the People: Celebrating 50 Years*, on Friday, October 18 at the African American Museum of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Kùlú Mèlé was founded in 1969 by legendary drummer Baba Robert "Ibikunle" Crowder, the dynamic ensemble is the oldest continually-performing African dance and drum ensemble in the nation; and

WHEREAS, Under Crowder's expert tutelage, the ensemble continued the traditions of iconic dancer/choreographers Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham by performing authentic dances of Africa and its Diaspora, and became a major part of the foundation of Philadelphia's Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Kùlú Mèlé helped give birth to a cultural renaissance in Philadelphia's African American communities and attracted those who were eager to study and experience African culture through the performing arts. Scores of dancers and drummers were trained by Crowder through Kùlú Mèlé at his longtime headquarters in West Philadelphia's Lee Cultural Center; and

WHEREAS, Kùlú Mèlé has been a crucial training ground for African dance, drum and culture throughout the Philadelphia region. Over 77 dancers and musicians have participated in Kùlú Mèlé through the years. The Philadelphia-based ensemble is dedicated to serving the community by presenting and preserving the culture, dance and music of Africa and its Diaspora; and

WHEREAS, Kùlú Mèlé draws on the musical and movement genres of Brazil, Haiti, Cuba, Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana and the Senegambia region, as well as African American art forms like Hip-hop, the Bop, Cha-cha and the Slop. The ensemble is the first performance on the main stage upon the sacred procession's return from the river at Philadelphia's annual Odunde Festival since its beginning in 1975; and

WHEREAS, In the 1990s Dorothy "Mama Dottie" Wilkie became artistic director and started incorporating West African dance into the choreography. She and her husband John "Wilk" Wilkie, the group's music director, both joined Kùlú Mèlé in 1971 as a dancer and drummer. In 2007, she was awarded the prestigious Pew Fellowship in the Arts for dance choreography. John was among the elder African drummers honored at "*Skin on Skins: Where it All Began*" at Philadelphia's historic Church of the Advocate in 2011. The husband and wife team was celebrated for their outstanding contributions to the cultural arts by the Philadelphia Folklore Project in 2015; and

WHEREAS, The Wilkies continue to follow in Baba Crowder's footsteps in advancing African culture by training dancers and drummers through Kùlú Mèlé so the culture will be preserved for future generations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby recognizes Kùlú Mèlé African Dance & Drum Ensemble on its 50th Anniversary.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to Kùlú Mèlé African Dance & Drum Ensemble as a sincere expression of the Council of the City of Philadelphia's gratitude, admiration and recognition.