

Legislation Text

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Also naming Reed Street between 12th Street and 13th Street, as “Mario Lanza Way”.

WHEREAS, Alfredo Arnold Cocozza was born to Maria Lanza and Antonio Cocozza on January 31, 1921 in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, As a young boy, Freddy became drawn to the family’s Victrola. With increasing intensity he would listen to 78-RPM operatic recordings with the accent on his favorite tenor, Enrico Caruso. Soon Freddy was singing along and studying plots. In his early teens he could discuss operatic arias and plots with authority. His first formal music training consisted of violin lessons, but his heart remained with opera. Recognizing her son’s latent talent, Maria Lanza Cocozza went to work to pay for Freddy’s voice lessons with Irene Williams, a local teacher with a good reputation; and

WHEREAS, In July 1942 the famous conductor Serge Koussevitzky was visiting Philadelphia and heard Freddy sing. His response was shocked, sincere, and immediate. Repeating the words Caruso redivivus (Caruso reborn), the maestro made immediate plans for Freddy to sing at Tanglewood. This resulted in his singing the role of Fenton in Otto Nicolai’s “The Merry Wives of Windsor”. It was at this time that Freddy took the masculine form of his mother’s maiden name and became Mario Lanza; and

WHEREAS, With the world at war it was not long before Mario was drafted. He was soon singing to new audiences, this time in a soldier’s uniform. Before being released in 1945, he had appeared in two Army productions, Frank Loesser’s “On the Beam” and the acclaimed Moss Hart production “Winged Victory”. These days also brought into his life the charming sister of an Army buddy, Betty Hicks. It was love at first sight and they were married on April 13, 1945. The union produced four children: Colleen, Ellisa, Damon, and Marc; and

WHEREAS, After his discharge, Mario spent more than a year in serious study with Enrico Rosati, the former vocal teacher of the great golden age tenor Beniamino Gigli. He signed a contract with Columbia Artists Management and toured as the tenor in the “Bel Canto Trio” with soprano Frances Yeend and baritone George London, both of whom enjoyed very successful operatic careers. After singing with Yeend at the Hollywood bowl on August 28, 1947, he was brought to the attention of MGM movie mogul Louis B. Mayer and the course of his life was forever altered; and

WHEREAS, As the saying goes, MGM gave Mario an offer he couldn’t refuse. In addition, a recording contract was consummated with RCA Victor. Events were moving at a very rapid pace. While waiting for his first motion picture, Mario fulfilled a commitment to sing the tenor role of Pinkerton in Puccini’s “Madama Butterfly” on April 8 and 10, 1948 for the New Orleans Opera Association. His first motion picture “That Midnight Kiss” was released in 1949 and was a smash hit making Mario Lanza a screen star overnight. This was soon followed by “The Toast of New Orleans” in 1950. Mario crossed paths with fate and destiny in 1951 when he starred as his childhood idol, Enrico Caruso, in “The Great Caruso”. This was a major triumph in every respect and brought Mario to the very pinnacle of success. This was followed in 1952 with “Because You’re Mine”; and

WHEREAS, Due to artistic disputes with MGM, Mario was replaced as the star of “The Student Prince” in 1954, however, his voice was used for the soundtrack. RCA Victor released the LP recording and it became the first million-seller soundtrack album. Mario Left MGM, made several recordings, and appeared on radio and television shows until 1956 when he starred in Warner Brother’s artistic “Serenade”. The Lanza family left for Italy on May 17, 1957 after which he performed for the Queen of England, in several sell-out recitals, and made his final two films, “The Seven Hills of Rome” in 1957 and “For The First Time” in 1959; and

WHEREAS, More than 60 years later he is still inspiring new generations of stars. While time passes, the rest of us listen, love, and remember. Now, on the occasion of the anniversary of his 100th birthday, we hereby honor and remember the impact that Mario Lanza has had on the world of opera; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the 1200 block of Reed Street, between 12th Street and 13th Street in the City of Philadelphia, shall henceforth also be known as “Mario Lanza Way”.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the Mario Lanza Museum, as further evidence of the sincere admiration and respect of this legislative body.