

**RESOLUTION NO. 1882**

**BILL NO. 34-0061**

**THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

**Regular Session**

**2021**

A Resolution honoring and commending Mr. Hillary “Baga” Rezende for his many contributions to steel pan music and his dedicated service to the people of the Virgin Islands

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**WHEREAS**, Mr. Hillary “Baga” Rezende was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad, West Indies in 1937: He grew up at a time and place where steel pans were first invented. During World War II, steel pans were hastily created to fill a gap in the musical entertainment that had been silenced by the colonial administration of the island;

**WHEREAS**, Baga’s life story with respect to his involvement with steel pan music concerns two major aspects that are interwoven with each other. First, there is his lifetime of perfecting the sound of the steel pan, and second, the passing on of the knowledge of playing pans to the youth. For Baga both phases demand differing degrees of discipline;

**WHEREAS**, Baga’s introduction and first attempts to build a tenor pan began when Baga was very young, and a group of men used to gather by the East Dry River in Port of Spain making instruments from 55-gallon drums. The drums were containers in which oil, liquids and powders were shipped to the island. As Baga and his family lived next to the Dry River, Baga heard and saw the men’s first attempts in making instruments. He watched what they were doing in hammering the faces of the barrels into first a convex shape;

**WHEREAS**, later he saw another band during Carnival time pounding the face of the barrel into a concave shape, making the face into a large bowl. In hearing the sound of that surface, he realized that the notes in the concave bowl surface sounded far better;

**WHEREAS**, watching and listening to the men crafting barrels into musical instruments inspired Baga at the age of 8 to work on one-gallon butter tins, which were the only metal containers he could find. He then hammered down the surface of the face and divided the tin’s surface into sections for the notes. To keep the notes in place and not have them run into one another, he used

a nail as a punch, creating an outline around each note to contain it. Then, with a smaller hammer, he gently pounded each note a certain way to get a specific sound for each of the notes marked out;

**WHEREAS**, soon Baga expanded beyond using butter tins. At the age of thirteen, he found a 55- gallon barrel, which had held disinfectant. At 6 am in his back yard he started making a tenor pan, the soprano sound of a band. He cut off the top thirteen inches of the barrel and put that portion flat on the ground to make his first tenor pan. As he looks back on his first attempt at making a steel pan, he says that it was a crude-sounding instrument. "It had a sound, but not a musical one", he explained;

**WHEREAS**, as Baga grew more proficient in making tenor pans, he was drawn to the different pan yards. In the Bellevue neighborhood, the village band was Cairo Steel Band. One day band members were waiting for their "big-time pan tuner" to come to start tuning the pans. After waiting for the tuner to show up, someone said, "Baga does tune pans. Let him tune the band.";

**WHEREAS**, of that time, Baga recounts that he was extremely frightened: "I did not know whether I would be able to tune all the notes in each of the different pans which made up a full band.", he explains. When the band's tuner finally showed up and heard the sound of the tenor pan Baga was working on, he told him to continue tuning the rest of the tenor pans while he worked on the others. Baga went on to build and tune all of the pans in that band, including the double second, guitar, cello, and bass pans;

**WHEREAS**, in 1966, Baga left Trinidad and Tobago and got a commission in Antigua to build back the Brute Force Steel Band pans from scratch. Ideally, this was the prime time of his career where his work was recognized. His pans produced "sweet" tones. As he recalls, a woman upon hearing the sound, yelled out, "Lord Jack, dem pans sound like organs, yah!";

**WHEREAS**, a year later in 1967, Baga then relocated to St. Croix, Virgin Islands. Baga was invited by Bill Bass of the Mellow Tones to build over and tune pans for his band. Baga also started performing with Bass's seven-member band, which performed seven nights a week at the Estate Carlton Hotel. Over the years, they performed in all the hotels on St. Croix;

**WHEREAS**, in the early 1970s, when Bill Bass was the instructor of the Central High School band, the band was invited to the Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena, California. Baga built the band and traveled with the student players and kept the pans tuned throughout the tour;

**WHEREAS**, in 1975, Darwin King, assistant director and a social worker of the Virgin Islands Commission on Youth offered Baga the position of director of a teenage band for which he was to build the instruments and instruct 100 students; The band was located in the De Chabert Housing Project at Richmond Penitentiary and was called the Ebonites. With Raymond "Masi" James, Baga recruited the students to join the band. This after-school organization was to promote wholesome activities and to demonstrate that discipline in playing an instrument carried over into successful school study habits;



**WHEREAS**, the Ebonites Band was invited to play in various activities of the Crucian Christmas Festival on St. Croix, at the opening events of the Agricultural Fair and performed the National Anthem at the first Triathlon;

**WHEREAS**, the Ebonites were then invited yearly to participate in the various events of the St. Thomas Carnival. People loved the band playing at the early morning tramp in the streets, *Jouvert*; the Food Fair, and in both the children's and adults' parades. In order to participate, players had to demonstrate good scholarship and grades in school;

**WHEREAS**, Baga invited a few of the students from the Ebonites to join his and Masi's own steel band, The Zodiacs, to play in hotels, entertaining tourists and locals on Tuesday night buffets and Sunday beach barbecues at the Hotel on the Cay. Besides playing, the band provided backup music for limbo dancers and fire-eaters, which became a part of a larger cultural performance. The Zodiacs were then invited to play during the summers at the Schaefer Canal House in Chesapeake City, Maryland;

**WHEREAS**, in the summer of 1989, Baga joined other Virgin Islands cultural artisans to demonstrate his art of making steel instruments at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, staged on the Washington Mall. This week-long session of workshops introduced steel pan making to a new audience. Everywhere these artisans went, they were serving as cultural ambassadors from the Virgin Island;

**WHEREAS**, Baga then returned to St. Croix to concentrate his efforts in building, tuning and teaching in St. Croix schools. He made instruments for many of the public schools as well as for church youth groups. He continued to tune pans in St. Thomas for carnival activities;

**WHEREAS**, in addition to putting in the hours in teaching young adults how to play musical instruments he instilled in them to play with a focused discipline. Baga stresses that the sound of the instrument is important, but the dedication with which the player approaches the playing shines through the musical melody;

**WHEREAS**, Baga continues to pass his legacy on to the younger generation when it comes to making, producing, playing a steel- pan instrument. He wants to pass on a piece of culture for every young adult with whom he comes in contact. His motto is: "To stay focused, you must discipline yourself in whatever you do."; and

**WHEREAS**, Baga hopes that every time he teaches someone how to play the steel pan, or interacts with a player, his association with that person enhances the person's life; Now, Therefore,

***Be it Resolved by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***


**SECTION 1.** The Legislature of the Virgin Islands, on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands, honors and commends Mr. Hillary "Baga" Rezende for his many achievements and contributions to steel pan music, his attainment of "sweet notes", and his dedicated service to the youth and the community of the Virgin Islands.


**SECTION 2.** The President of the Legislature of the President’s designee shall prepare and present a perma plaque copy of this Resolution to Mr. Hillary “Baga” Rezende at an appropriated ceremony.

Thus passed by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands on November 18, 2021.

Witness our Hands and Seal of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands this 23<sup>rd</sup> Day of November, A.D., 2021.



  
Donna A. Frett-Gregory  
President

  
Genevieve R. Whitaker  
Secretary