

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed members of the Batiste family and friends, I am Dr. Mary Lee, Founder and President of Neighborhood Commerce Institute (NCI), the premier organization nationwide for empowering the black community for economic development and stability. Today we gather with heavy hearts to pay tribute to an extraordinary individual whose talent and spirit touched the hearts of people across the world. We come together to express our deepest sympathies to the Batiste family and specifically to our esteemed executive member Damon Batiste, Chief of Events, Entertainment and Arts Education at NCI on the passing of his beloved brother Mr. David Russell Batiste Jr. affectionately known as "The Young Lion". We are honored and privileged to have Damon as an exceptional leader who amplifies underrepresented voices and implements educational initiatives to provide access to the arts and foster an environment of lifelong appreciation for artistic expression and cultural change. Today we unite with Damon and the Batiste family to extend our steadfast support as we commemorate the extraordinary life of a true legend Mr. David Russell Batiste Jr.

Today we not only gather to mourn your loss but also to celebrate the gift of life that comes from God alone. The Bible declares that every good and perfect gift comes from above. God has gifted everyone to do something, some choose to merely use their gift, others have chosen to develop and polish their gift until it shines, capturing the attention of the world. The term is often used that so-and-so is a natural born this, or a natural born that. Yes, exceptional talents cause us to believe that they were placed on the earth to do certain things. It seems as if Mahalia Jackson was born to sing - Louis Armstrong was born to be a trumpeter - John Coltrane was born to play the saxophone, and Duke Ellington was born to be a pianist. Russell was a drummer. Though this prodigy learned how to play several instruments by the age of (7), the heartbeat of his soul resonated through his artistry as a drummer.

It is said that some will always "march to the beat of a different drummer". I believe many would say that when the "Young Lion" was around, there was no need for a different drummer. Groups such as Vita Blue, Papa Grows Funk, The Wild Magnolia, and Joe Krone Trio all knew that when Russell was in the house and on the stage, they marched to his beat, he set the pace and established the rhythm.

Russell's proficiency as a drummer, his international recognition and his profound influence on the New Orleans music scene serve as a testament to his exceptional essence. He was a musical virtuoso whose rhythms and beats infused vitality into the New Orleans music community and far beyond. Russell's musical journey led him to collaborate with his own Orkestra from the Hood, Russell Batiste and Friends and a myriad of renowned funk bands.

Russell's father, Mr. David Batiste Sr., aptly described him as a "Funk Pioneer". Even Mick Jagger considered Russell to be the world's best drummer bar none.

Beyond being a musician, he embraced the roles of being a cherished friend, a beloved brother, grandfather, a respected cousin, a doting uncle and an inspirational mentor. In the words of his friend Cyril Neville, Russell was not just a musician but a living testament to the rich cultural roots of New Orleans. He emphasized "*the only way to be possibly funkier than Russell was to be born a skunk.*" Russell's musical talent was unparalleled. His contributions to both his family and the broader community went far beyond the stage he was a guiding light, an anchor and the source of inspiration for many.

Russell's profound love for his family was undeniable and unwavering. His brothers Damon, Ryan, and Jamal all found inspiration in his musical journey and followed in his footsteps, becoming musicians themselves. As Russell's brother, Damon, so eloquently put it Russell was not only a musical powerhouse but "*a major economic development engine by himself.*" In his younger years Russell poured his heart and soul into various musical projects to support fellow artists and bands. Damon emphasized that for Russell it was never about accolades or financial gain, his sole motivation was to ensure the music was impeccable. Russell's deep-seated love for New Orleans was undeniable and he enjoyed gathering with his friends at local establishments that formed the heartbeat of the city's music scene, places like the Maple Leaf Bar and Le Bon Temps Roule.

Russell's legacy is transcendent, making him a pioneering figure for the next generation of Batiste family members. His cousin the Grammy award-winning artist John Batiste provided profound insight into Russell's significance when he described them as "*an unsung genius that is loved and beloved.*" Jon likened Russell's stature in the world of music to that of iconic legends like Prince and other greats.

His groundbreaking contributions continue to resonate shaping the musical landscape for generations to come and inspiring young artists to follow their passions and leave their indelible mark on the world just as Russell did. While we mourn his passing, we celebrate the extraordinary life he lived and the remarkable music he gifted to the world.

To the Batiste family we extend our deepest condolences and stand by you with our unwavering support. While Russell may no longer be with us, his spirit lives on through the music he created and, in the hearts, and lives he touched. May the grace of God keep and comfort you as you embrace the love of family and the strength of your friends.

In closing, let's remember Russell as not merely a musician, but a true legend, a Funk Pioneer, and a cherished member of our community. His impact on the world is enduring and his music has left an indelible mark on our lives. Mr. David Russell Batiste Jr.'s legacy lives on as a testament to the power of music to unite and uplift us all.

Thank you,

The Neighborhood Commerce Institute in (NCI) family.