

(H. B. 1275)

(No. 40)

(Approved January 27, 2006)

AN ACT

To direct the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Public Structure and Highway Naming Commission of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to name the Triangular Park of Aurora Street in the Municipality of Ponce after Ponce's very own distinguished soprano, Graciela Rivera.

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

Doña Graciela was born in the Municipality of Ponce on April 17, 1921, the seventh of the eight children of Minister Gonzalo Salvador and Mrs. Enriqueta Padilla. During her childhood years, her family moved to the Municipality of Cataño and then to Santurce where she attended Rafael Cordero School, Rafael Ma. De Labra School, and Central High School. There, she met teacher Dwight W. Hiestand, an American who taught English, and being a true opera admirer, he had established an opera workshop in the school facilities; thus young Graciela had the opportunity to be exposed to this musical genre, soon becoming a prominent soprano soloist. She took part in school productions such as *Rigoletto*, *Lucia Di Lammermoor*, *The Magic Flute*, and even in *Il Trovatore* and *Aida*, pieces that were not for her vocal range or tessitura.

Graciela desired to go to New York to study music and singing, but she did not have the necessary means to afford an opera career. So, after graduating from high school, her teacher applied for a government

scholarship for her, which was denied, because this type of studies was not important. This experience, however, did not frustrate nor disheartened her, and she continued working hard thus becoming a great example of perseverance and self-improvement. Finally, with the help of Mr. Joseph Zumchack, who later became her husband, she gave concerts and after enormous efforts, she managed to gather the necessary money to study at Julliard School of Music in New York. In this manner, our coloratura soprano successfully built an extraordinary career in Europe, the United States, and Latin America.

In February, 1945, *Doña* Graciela made her professional debut in the city of Buffalo with the musical piece *Rosalind* by Johann Strauss. In June of that same year, she traveled to Europe with the production to sing for the World War II soldiers in the theaters of France and Germany. Towards the end of that same year, she played Rosina in *The Barber of Seville* with the New Orleans Opera Company; then, she performed with the same Company in *Rigoletto*, *Lucia Di Lammermoor*, and *Lakmé*.

Doña Graciela returns to Puerto Rico in 1947, when she offered her art performing at Pro-Arte concerts, the University of Puerto Rico, and different radio programs. In January, 1949, Graciela makes her debut in the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples, Italy, performance which was broadcast over the government radio station. During said season, she performed in the theater, also interpreting *Rigoletto* and Bellini's *La Sonnambula* for more than a year. It is during March of 1950 that she made her debut in the Teatro Real di Roma, performing in operas and concerts in Catania, Trieste, Bologna, Florence, Genoa, and the Arena di Verona. In that same period, she traveled to England, where she makes her debut in the Opera Theater of Lisbon, Portugal.

For many years, she was based in New York City, where in 1951 she made her debut at the New York City Opera, performing in the Madison Square Garden, Radio City Music Hall, Town Hall, Carnegie Hall, Waldorf Astoria Hotel, Hunter College, Avery Fisher Hall, and Lewison Stadium. On February 4, 1952, she became the first Puerto Rican singer to debut in the Metropolitan Opera House in the role of Lucia di Lammermoor. During this period, she also takes part in several radio and television programs in the United States and Canada such as the “Bell Telephone Hour,” “Your Show of Shows” as well as with the “Mutual Broadcasting Co.,” La Colombia, and the “National Broadcasting” in Canada.

She returns to Europe, to Naples in 1954, to play the leading role of the world premiere of the opera *Il Pescatore* by Jacobo Napoli, under the direction of legendary musical director Tullio Serafin. During her stay there, Pope Pius XII received our soprano in a private audience sending regards to the Puerto Rican People with her.

Our Graciela continued to sing opera throughout almost all the cities of the United States, with various opera companies such as the San Carlo Opera House, and La Scala Opera Co., among others. She also worked with great opera directors such as Oliviero de Fabritis, Fausto Cleva, Tullio Serafin, Carlos Chávez, Franco Capuana, Franco Ghione, Pietro Cimara, Incola Resigno, Víctor de Sabata, Franco Molinari Pradelli, and Alfredo Antonini. Under the direction of these great directors, Graciela sang together with great stars such as Leonard Warren, Jan Peerce, Richard Tucker, Robert Cerril, Giuseppe Valdengo, Cesare Valletti, Giuseppe Di Stefano, Ferruccio Tagliavini, Nicola Moscona, Giuseppe Taddei and Luigi Infantino. Many of the reviews on her participation in operas mention Puerto Rico, since she always spoke of her island with great pride.

In 1960, Graciela returned to the Island to participate in the Fourth Casals Festival in which she interpreted the music of Mozart and Handel. In 1972, she was invited by the De Hostos College in New York to join them as professor in a course of Puerto Rican Music History, in the Italian and Spanish courses, and in the chorus and in an opera workshop. During that period, she offered illustrated lectures in institutions such as Hunter College, Rutgers University, and Lehman College, among others. In 1974, she produced the opera *La Nela* by Puerto Rican Composer Manuel B. Rodríguez, based on a novel by Benito Pérez Galdós, *Marianela*, which was presented in New Jersey. At present, Graciela resides in Ponce and remains active by giving lectures on her book *Orígenes, Influencias y Desarrollo Autóctono*.

In spite of her artistic achievements, at world level, Graciela has always been an unpretentious person, a fact that impresses those who have the pleasure to meet her. For these reasons, this Legislature deems it important to honor this lady who has been a great example of our society, in life.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF PUERTO RICO:

Section 1.- The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Public Structure and Highway Naming Commission of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, is hereby directed to name the Triangular Park of Aurora Street in the Municipality of Ponce after Graciela Rivera.

Section 2.- This Act shall take effect immediately after its approval.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify to the Secretary of State that the following Act No. 40 (H.B.1275) of the 3rd Session of the 15th Legislature of Puerto Rico:

AN ACT to direct the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Public Structure and Highway Naming Commission of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to name the Triangular Park of Aurora Street in the Municipality of Ponce after Ponce's very own distinguished soprano, Graciela Rivera,

has been translated from Spanish to English and that the English version is correct.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, today 12th of January of 2007.

Francisco J. Domenech
Director