

***Expression of Condolence for  
Wilburn Theodore “Stranger” Cole by Toronto City Council***

**Moved by: Councillor Mike Colle**

**Seconded by: Councillor Michael Thompson**

The Mayor and Members of Toronto City Council are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Wilburn Theodore “Stranger” Cole. A legendary ska, rocksteady, and reggae pioneer and longtime resident of Toronto’s Little Jamaica community, Stranger Cole leaves behind a legacy of music, family, and community.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1942, Mr. Cole found initial success as a songwriter, before recording hits throughout the 1960s. He emigrated to the United Kingdom in 1971, before settling in Toronto in 1973. Here, he worked as a machinist at the Tonka Toy factory while continuing his musical career. His first album, *“Forward” in the Land of Sunshine*, was released in 1976, with a handful of further albums released over the next ten years, mostly on his own label.

In 1978, he accepted a friend’s offer to share space in his carpet store at 58 Kensington Avenue and began to sell recordings of jazz, gospel, disco and reggae music. Roots Records became one of Kensington Market’s first Caribbean-owned businesses, and was a central congregating place for musicians and music fans alike, with Mr. Cole mentoring and supporting many local musicians. As Mr. Cole sold vinyl by day and continued recording and performing by night, Toronto’s reggae scene grew around him, eventually becoming the second-largest producer of reggae music in the world.

Mr. Cole was awarded a Certificate of Merit by the Jamaican government for his pioneering role in the country’s music industry. In 2015, he was one of the artists depicted in the giant Reggae Lane mural in Toronto’s Little Jamaica neighbourhood. In 2019, he returned to Toronto to take part in the Titans of Reggae showcase at the Opera House.

Mr. Cole, who was predeceased by his son Wilbert, leaves six children, Wilburn, Philippa, Christopher, Sophia, Philip and Marcus, and numerous grandchildren.

The City Clerk is requested to convey, on behalf of the Members of Toronto City Council, our sincere sympathy to Mr. Cole’s family.

June 24, 2026