

WORLDWIDE BLUES CONCERT GUIDE INSIDE

# *Southland* **Blues**

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## **ALLEN TOUSSAINT**

**New Orleans Legend Reflects on His Long Career**

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# ALLEN TOUSSAINT

## New Orleans Legend Launches NYNO Record Label

It was 1991 when I first met Allen Toussaint. He was a speaker at the Cutting Edge Music Conference in his home town New Orleans. As I listened to Allen, what I found interesting was his diversity of talent and abilities. I was familiar with his career as a producer, songwriter, singer, and piano player. What I didn't realize was how extremely well versed he was in all aspects of the music business.

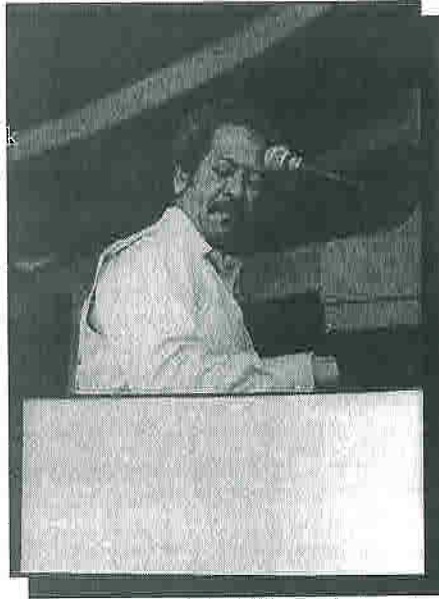
When Allen spoke about recording, dealing with studios and the business perspective, it was like listening to the best instructor you ever had in any school. Allen Toussaint has many interesting things to say and is concise in the way he says them.

After the session, people approached him to ask questions (including myself). He cordially answered all questions and appeared to enjoy himself and people. That night I arrived at Cafe Dumont (a New Orleans landmark) I walked by the table where Allen was sitting and much to my surprise he immediately said hello. We picked up our earlier conversation about the blues and the New Orleans Music scene.

Years later my initial impression of Allen was reaffirmed during a special celebration childrens performance at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival to honor Mr. Toussaint for his many accomplishments and contributions to children and the community. As I watched these very talented children perform I looked at Allen to see a very large smile and a great gleam in his eyes. He was truly pleased and impressed with what he saw.

Reading this interview, you notice that Allen is a man who has done it all, yet with a special flair and sense of style which lead to his success as a person and as an artist.

**E:** The hardest part of this interview, Allen, is where to start. You have done so much in music, as a producer, arranger, artist and even as a record company executive. You've also been a tremendous benefit to the



Photos: Sheldon J. Eskin © 1998

community. When I saw you at Jazz-Fest '98 in New Orleans, you were honored by the children. What was that children's award all about?

**T:** It was just a celebration for work I've done in the community, and being inducted into the Hall of Fame and things like that.

**E:** The kids did a great job and your face looked so happy, you were smiling so big.

**T:** Well, I was elated. I thought it was absolutely wonderful. I had no idea it would be such a gala event. I didn't know what I was there for, or what was going to take place and go on, and on. It took a lot of preparation and a lot of cooperation from lots of different people for that to happen.

**E:** I got there before you did and everyone was running around saying, "Allen Toussaint is going to be here." The kids were so excited. I know they had a lot of costume changes. And you were excited about it.

**T:** I certainly was.

**E:** Allen, how did it feel being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?

**T:** It was wonderful, because my being one

who lived most of my career behind the scene, where I've been very comfortable. That's been simply the way it has been for me. So, I certainly didn't expect nothing of that magnitude, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. I usually think of that for the people who are out front. So, I just thought it was wonderful.

**E:** Did you start your career writing, singing or playing the piano?

**T:** Oh, playing the piano was the first. That was it, playing of the piano. Writing came along shortly afterward. Writing was a natural evolution for me.

**E:** Did Professor Longhair, coin you "The Bach of Rock"?

**T:** No, I called him the Bach of Rock. Yes, he's our Bach of Rock.

**E:** Many articles say that you learned from Professor Longhair. I take it you played with him?

**T:** Well, let me say that I didn't actually play with Fess until I was over 21. As a boy, however, when I heard Professor Longhair I just was knocked out. It just changed life for me; it made life more exciting. So, I learned an awful lot from him that sticks forever. But it's not like we sat down at the piano together, because when I was learning most of what I know from Professor Long Hair, I had never seen him.

I remember seeing him one time at a record hop, they called them record hops years ago. Teenage hops. And I saw him playing the spinet piano at a record hop when I was about 16. And that's the first memory I have of actually seeing Professor Longhair. That's what I remember he could really fly. And it was many years afterwards that I eventually saw him again, and for us to actually play together, it was great.

**E:** You wrote the song "Whipped Cream". I was working at A&M Records at about the same time as that song was released.

**T:** Yeah.

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E: That was a song done by Herb Alpert and was the theme song of The Dating Game.

T: Yes, the very first one.

E: How did "Whipped Cream" come about?

T: "Whipped Cream" came about as a joke. When I was in the military, from '63 to '65, I played on the weekends with a small band called The Stokes; we had two horns and a rhythm section. The two horn players were young guys who lived near the post, another guy was away in the military just like myself. They heard that I had written these other songs, songs like "Java," and they just couldn't believe that I would write something that they thought was pretty candid, like "Java."

E: "Java" was the Al Hirt song, right?

T: Yes. Now, they knew I had written these R&B songs, like "Mother-in-Law," and things like that. "Java," and the like, they didn't associate with me, and they found that so humorous. But I like writing like that, so as a response to that small bit of humor, I wrote about 15 songs at that time, and "Whipped Cream" was one of them. I wrote it for the band to play because I was writing and arranging almost everything for the band. I wrote those songs, and my partner, Joe Banashak; well, he wasn't my partner. I was working for the record company, Minit. I told him that we had collected all this material at that time. He suggested that we record it, so we recorded an album with that military band--not a military band, but the band at that time, the Stokes--and "Whipped Cream" was one of those songs, as a humorous extension.

E: Sure did turn into something great.

T: Oh, yeah, I had great fun with that period.

E: You worked as a musician and a singer, at Minit but didn't you also work in the company in the business side as well?

T: Well, with Minit, I was the music-maker. I was the A&R man (Artist and Repertoire). I was the producer, you might say. The business people were Larry McKinley and Joe Banashak. They handled all of the business, and I just totally trusted them. I think it was a very good place to be, and a good thing to do. It was very good for me.

E: You're with Nyno Records now, your own record company?

T: Oh, yes. Nyno, is the word of the day for me.

E: We all build on our experiences. Do you think your experience at Minit helped you with everything you've done?

T: Oh, yes. Minit, for one thing, gave me carte blanche to do anything to make any kind of music, or just do any musical venture that I wanted to. And during those days I spent everyday with the artists, like Dennis Felman, Ernie K-Doe, Aaron Neville, Irma Thomas. They'd be around--well, it was at my parents' home, in the living room. And we would congregate there daily and just sing and play and have a great time, and just take that to the studio. Minit gave me carte blanche to just do and try anything, so that was a university for me.

E: I want to go on some more about Nyno, and I want to find out some more about the latest things that are going on, but I have one question that I've wanted to you ask for a long time: When "Mother-In-Law" came out and all the kids in school were walking around the halls singing it. It was the greatest song. I heard a story that you wrote, "Mother-In-Law," and didn't really like it, and you threw it away. Then Ernie K-Doe came along and found it.

T: Well, that is pretty accurate. Just to put the time precisely, it was the same day and in the same hour that we took it out of the trash can and gave it another chance. Because I had written several songs for him, so when I first tried "Mother-In-Law" out on him, it didn't seem to fit him as well as I thought it should. And having other things that I had prepared for him, I just figured that rather than take him through any channels or hassles, I'd just discard this and go to the next one. And that's what I did.

E: That song was a tremendous hit. It's still being sung. It's still a very current song even today. How did it then evolve?

T: Well, when I did ball it up and throw it into the trash can, like we did many songs, after we went through the next song--there were two or three others that we were doing. Willy Harper and Ernie K-Doe, Willy Harper being one of the backup singers who sang the higher part in "Mother-In-Law," he and K-Doe said, "Man, you ought to take this out of the trash can and give that song another chance. It may work." And we did

that. And the next time around K-Doe did much better and we gave it a chance and it did live. Just like they did.

E: Oh, lived and lived. That is probably one of the songs that will constantly live on. You also did songs for Bonnie Raitt, Etta James, Dr. John, Boz Skaggs, Glen Campbell, Lady Marmalade, Dr. John, Lee Dorsey, Bennie Spellman, Aaron Neville -- oh, you name it, you've done it.

T: Well, let me say about "Lady Marmalade," just so it wouldn't be misleading. I produced and arranged that song. That song was penned by Bob Crewe and Kenny Nolan. "Lady Marmalade."

E: That's "Voulez-vous couchez avec moi ce soir" for those of you who know it that way.

T: Yeah, it was just so right for LaBelle to do. And I must say that when they came to town with their manager, Vicki Wickham, they had a couple of demos that they wanted to try and wanted me to listen to see if I thought this was something we should do. And "Lady Marmalade," another version of it, was one of the songs. And I just thought that was a great idea and we got right to work on it.

E: It was! Everybody loved it!

E: When I heard the *Allen Toussaint Connected* album, I listened to the diversity of the music in it. You get an album sometimes and you'll get one song that is almost the same as the next, and the next. *Connected* is different. "Sweet Dreams" is one of the most beautiful songs. How did the idea for this song come about?

T: "Sweet Dreams." It's one of those songs when you're in the mode and open for inspiration, things just come. I must be honest, that someone called me to tell me to tell me, "I just called to say goodnight." That's how that came about. When that person said that they "just called to say goodnight," I was in such a hurry to get those first lines down I could hardly hear anything else they said. Because I just knew that it was a winner. I don't mean like a hit or anything, but just an inspirational lyric when someone calls and says, "I just called to say goodnight to you." I mean what a feeling.

E: That's beautiful! And the way you arranged and produced "Sweet Dreams" it says so much and has such great changes. Who is the young lady that sings with you? The one that comes in during the transition.

She's great.

**T:** That's Trisha. Her name is Tricia Boutta, and she's also an artist. She's also with "Cool Riddims." That's a Nyno act, and it's a reggae band from New Orleans with a New Orleans twist to it. She is the same lady with a pseudonym name, which is Sista Teedy with Cool Riddims.

**E:** She is so smooth.

**T:** Oh, she's wonderful.

**E:** The first time I heard "Sweet Dreams" I was listening and it did the change, and then she slid in and knocked my socks off.

**T:** Oh, is that right?

**E:** What are some of the other songs that you like on the *Connected* album?"

**T:** On *Connected*, I had a good time, I guess you can tell, because of the diversity of the project. I do like "In Your Love" even though I did that thing that I did on an early Southern Night album. I sang through a Leslie speaker, and it's hard to understand the lyrics. But it was done on *Connected*, to be a modern-day version of how I felt during the time of "Southern Nights," without that same story.

**E:** The song "Do The Do," seems to be

getting a lot of hype. "Do The Do," do you like that song?

**T:** I like that because that was written and performed with Professor Longhair in mind. As was the whole concept, of "Do the Do." The way the lines are, the way the phrases are, and the way the piano is, it was definitely inspired by all of the things that Fess (Professor Longhair) has given me through the years.

**E:** You can hear it so well. Now, you have Sea-Saint, the studio.

**T:** Sea-Saint, yes.

**E:** There was a an article in Mix Magazine about recording studios a while back, they were talking about Sea-Saint and talking about the great studio that it is, and you really like being in the studio don't you?

**T:** I love it, yes. I'm so at home there. I was brought up in the studio, you might say.

**E:** You've had a lot of artists such as Dr. John record there, who were some of the other artists that recorded at Sea-Saint?

**T:** Well, Patti LaBelle, of course. We did a little bit of the Joe Cocker album here, the one that I produced on him "Luxury You Can Afford." Frankie Miller, Eric Gayle in his

time, Ramsey Lewis. Loads of wonderful people, Etta James and, of course, all of Lee Dorsey things, a lot of great artist and music.

**E:** Sea Saint is a great studio. And Nyno is a great label. When did you start Nyno

**T:** Thank you! Nyno is approaching three years old. Nyno is the result of my partner, Josh Feigenbaum of MJ1 in New York and myself of New Orleans. He was my friend and I would visit New York and we'd hang out, and one conversation he suggested that-well, he asked about an idea of coming up with a label devoted to the indigenous music of New Orleans. And I thought that was a grand idea, and we got right to work on it.

**E:** It's doing really well.

**T:** Oh, yeah. It's a labor of love, and we really care about what we are doing.

**E:** You have a very good staff there. The people I've met that work for you, are conscientious, and on top of things, and that's nice. It's great to have a business where people like working, and care about what they do.

**T:** Yeah.

**E:** Are you planning to tour in the near future?

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## BLUES RADIO

**Mon. Mid-2am** "Is It Late Sunday or Monday Morning Blues" with Ted "T" Tepsich, KSDS 88.3 FM (San Diego)

**Mon. 9am-Noon** "DJ Play My Blues," with Jeff Scott, KUCI 88.9 FM (Irvine)

**Mon. 9:30am-Noon** "Bluesland" with Leo Schumaker, KCSB 91.9 FM (S.Barbara)

**Tue. 9-11pm** "Blue Mood" with Robert Kreutzer, KUCR 88.3 FM (Riverside)

**Wed. 8-10pm** "On the Mike Side" with Mike Petrini, KCSB 91.9 FM (Santa Barbara)

**Thu. Mid-2am** "Blues Hotel" with Papa John, Ian & Morris Beef KXLU 88.9 FM (Los Angeles)

**Thurs. 8-10pm** "Preachin' The Blues" with Ed Archer, KPFC 90.7 FM (Los Angeles)

**Fri. 4-4:30pm** "Hop City Blues Hour with Russell," KUCI 88.9 FM (Irvine)

**Fri. 6-8am** "Hear the Blues with Russell," KUCI 88.9 FM (Irvine)

**Fri. 6-8pm** "Burnt Dog Blues Lounge" w/ Red Headed Stepchild, KCPR 91.3 FM (San Luis Obispo)

**Fri. 8-10pm** "Friday Night Blues Revue" with Juke Logan/Ellen Bloom, KPCC 89.3FM(Pasadena)

**Fri. 9-10pm** "Blues from the Red Rooster," KUOR 89.1 FM (Redlands)

**Fri. 10pm-1am** "Friday Night Blues Show" w/Nate Budington, KUOR 89.1 FM (Redlands)

**Fri. 10pm-4am** "Rhapsody in Black" with Bill Gardner & John L., KPCC 89.3 FM (Pasadena)

**Sat. 6am-8am** "Hear the Blues with Russell, KSPC 88.7 FM (Claremont)

**Sat. 10-11am** "House of Blues Radio Hour," with Elwood Blues KCKC 1350 AM (San Bernardino)

**Sat. 2-7pm** "Nothin' But the Blues" with Gary Wagner, KLON 88.1 FM (Long Beach)

**Sat. 11am-1pm** "Down Home Blues" with Left Coast Carl, KSPC 88.7 FM (Claremont)

**Sat. 4-5pm** "Earth Tones" with Roni Grant, KCLA 99.3 FM (Los Angeles)

**Sat. 8pm-Mid.** "Blues From The Basement" with Basement Bob, KSAK 90.1 FM (Walnut)

**Sat. 8-10pm** "Evening Blues" with Chris Whitby & Slim Peterson, KCBX 90.1 FM (San Luis Obispo)

**Sat. 8-10pm** "Jumpin' the Bluesi," with Matt Cohen, KCSB FM 91.9 (Santa Barbara)

**Sun. Mid.-4am** "Ann the Raven" KPCC 89.3 FM (Pasadena)

**Sat. 9pm-6am** "Every Shade of Blue" with Ted "T" Tepsich KSDS 88.3 FM (San Diego)

**Sun. 6am-Noon** "The Blues" Big Daddy Cain, KWBR 95.3 FM (Arroyo Grande)

**Sun. 9am-1pm** "Blues Den" with L.J. Evans, KXTZ 95.3 FM (San Luis Obispo)

**Sun. 10am-Noon** "Straight Up Blues" with Art Martel, KSPC 88.7 FM (Claremont)

**Sun. Noon-3pm** "Kaleidoscope of Blues" with Donald Mooring, KSBK 88.5 FM (Mission Viejo)

**Sun. 1-3pm** "The Blues Shack" with Grayboy Dan Pollock, KCLU 88.3 FM (Ventura); 102.3 FM (Santa Barbara Co.)

**Sun. 2-7pm** "Nothin' But the Blues" with Gary Wagner, KLON 88.1 FM (Long Beach)

**Sun. 5-6:30pm** "Blues Routes" with Cary Ginell, KCLU 88.3 FM (Thousand Oaks)

**Sun. 6-8pm** "Nightcrawler Blues Show" with Fred Rivera, KRTM 88.9 FM (Temecula)

**Sun. 8-10pm** "Blues on Tap" with Steamn' Stan Ruffo KIOO 99.7 FM (Visalia)

**Sun. 9-10pm** "House of Blues Radio Hour," with Elwood Blues KLOS 95.5 FM (L.A.)

**Sun. 10-11pm** "Blues Deluxe" with Dave Johnson KLOS 95.5 FM (Los Angeles)



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LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

T: Well, we haven't planned a tour, well, we had a brief Nyno tour early last year. A very brief one. I don't have a tour being planned now, but Nyno intends to do a promotional tour and I am so ready for it. But we haven't planned one yet.

E: That will be a tour not to miss. I am sure it will be great. There is another award you received, well there are probably a million that I did not touch on but I know that you recently received an Entertainer of the year Award.

T: Oh yes! From Gambit. And it was wonderful, yes. It's built around artists in New Orleans, and I feel very good about that. Well, I love awards, for one thing. Awards are forever. They're just really forever. They are more forever than the dollar. And awards many times mean what people just simply think of your work. And I just think that's great.

E: Well, you deserve all of the recognition that anybody could ever possibly give you. I say that with all due respect and love for your music, and respect for you. I really thank you for taking the time to talk with me. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

T: Oh, thank you very, very much. We have new releases coming out. We recorded a guy named Oliver Morgan who has been around forever, since before Christ. And we have a new record on him that I just think the world of. I've always really appreciated his voice. He has one of those gravelly voices that you can hardly understand. And it's just great to have worked with him.

And we have a new release on Sista Teedy and Cool Riddims, and we're just about to complete our second CD on Amadee Castenell, who is saxophonist we're really enthusiastic. And I'm having a ball with Nyno.

--Sheldon J. Eskin © 1998

*Sheldon J. Eskin is a noted author and attorney specializing in Entertainment & Broadcast Law, with 30 years of association in the record industry and radio fields. He is the host of the syndicated program "Voice of the Blues" and is a well known performance photographer.*

by Jon Pepper

## DAVID LEON & THE LITTLE JUGS

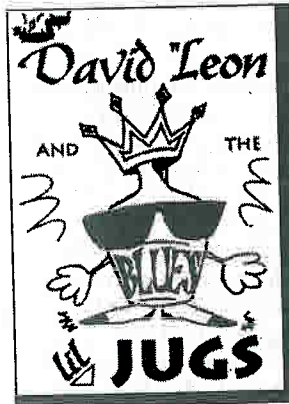
David Leon & The Little Jugs got together about three years ago and thought that they would be just another bar band playing for a few free beers. And then the surprising thing happened, the band started to take off and make some money. Now with their third anniversary approaching and the upcoming release of their debut CD David Leon & The Little Jugs are sitting pretty.

"It all started about six years ago, when I met Eddie V. (guitar player for the Little Jugs) at the Santa Fe Springs Swap Meet." said David Leon, vocalist and harmonica player for the band. "After about three years we got serious and put an ad in the Recycler, and that's how we got Freddie Stark, our bass player."

The last addition was Alan West on drums, who was added to the band when his roommate recommended him to the band. "At first, he thought he wasn't good enough, but he started coming to this gig and that

gig and pretty soon he was our drummer." said Leon.

Leon, who has been playing the harmonica for about eight years, but only really has been serious about the last five, also is the main songwriter for the group. "They are just slices of life, you know everyday stuff we all go through." added Leon.



The main influence on the band has mainly been the older bluesmen, Sonny Boy Williamson, Little Walter, Jimmy Reed, but there is one name that has to be added to this list, says Leon, "Lee McBee (harmonica player and vocalist with Mike Morgan and The Crawl), I met him a couple of times and he really said some very nice and helpful things to me.

While the band is bluesmen and likes to have a good time when they are playing, Leon says that when it comes to being at home, he is very much a homebody. "I like staying at home, playing with my two kids, hanging out with my family and friends." said Leon, who was born and still lives in Azusa.

So whether it is good time party music or serious blues, David Leon & The Little Jugs are pros. They have a good time, but are set on putting their own stamp on this music.