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Huey "Piano" Smith and the Rocking Pneumonia Blues

John Wirt

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Huey "Piano" Smith's musical legacy stands alongside that of fellow New Orleans legends Dr. John, Fats Domino, Ernie K-Doe, and Allen Toussaint. His 1957 classic, "Rocking Pneumonia and the Boogie Woogie Flu," made Billboard's top R&B singles chart, and hundreds of artists including Aerosmith, the Grateful Dead, the Beach Boys, Johnny Rivers, and Chubby Checker have recorded his songs.

The first biography of the artist responsible for hits "Don't You Just Know It," "High Blood Pressure," and "Sea Cruise," Huey "Piano" Smith and the Rocking Pneumonia Blues follows the musician's extraordinary life from his Depression-era childhood to his teen years as a pianist for blues star Guitar Slim to his mainstream success in the 1950s and '60s. Drawing from extensive interviews and court records, author and journalist John Wirt also provides new insights on Smith's professional disappointments and financial struggles in the 1980s and '90s as he battled over royalties from his most successful and profitable work.

An enigmatic and guarded personality in a profession of extroverted performers, Smith made farreaching contributions to the New Orleans music scene as a songwriter, pianist, and producer. Wirt reveals that Smith's numerous collaborations with other artists -- including the Clowns, the Pitter Pats, the Hueys, and Shindig Smith and the Soul Shakers -- served as vehicles for his creative vision rather than simply as an anonymous backup for a leading front man.

Throughout this intimate account, Wirt details Smith's significant impact on rock and roll history and underscores both the longevity of his music -- which has entertained and inspired for over five decades -- and the musician's personal endurance in the face of hardship and opposition.

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