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BOOK NEWS

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LSU Press to Publish First Biography of Huey “Piano” Smith

Journalist John Wirt brings to light the life of an early architect of funk

“I credit Huey with opening the door for funk, basically as we know it, in some ridiculously hip way, and putting it in the mainstream of the world’s music.” –Dr. John, 2011 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee

Baton Rouge— Huey “Piano” Smith’s musical legacy stands alongside fellow New Orleans legends like 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 have recorded his songs, including Aerosmith, the Grateful Dead, the Beach Boys, Johnny Rivers, and Chubby Checker.

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 from his Depression-era childhood to his 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 of the 1980s and ’90s as he battled for legal ownership of his most successful and profitable work.

An enigmatic and guarded personality in a profession of extroverted performers, Smith made far-reaching contributions to the New Orleans music scene as a songwriter, pianist, and producer. Wirt reveals that Smith’s numerous collaborative ventures—including the Clowns, the Pitter Pats, the Hueys and Shin-Dig Smith, and the Soul Shakers—were vehicles for his creative vision rather than 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.

John Wirt has covered music, film, and entertainment for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, and *The Advocate*’s Baton Rouge and New Orleans editions.

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