



Jon Cleary - So Swell

Musicians:

Jon Cleary - Vocals, Piano, B3 Organ, Percussion

James Singleton - Upright Bass

Johnny Vidacovich - Drums

James Rivers - Saxophone

“My family was Londoners but my mom and dad moved down to the country when I was very little. What I heard was what every kid heard at that time. We had one program a week on English TV called Top of the Pops, which was usually pretty dreadful. But through my family I had access to this other world of music. They all were music lovers and they all had tastes that were in a particular area. One of the people I learned the most from was my Auntie, who around '73 was a striking gorgeous girl with big afro and platform shoes and hot pants. And so I'd go through her record collection and there was Donny Hathaway, and all kinds of hip Staple Singers, Dr John, the Right Place, Wrong Time album. And her brother, my uncle, had recently returned from a long stay here in New Orleans. He was an exotic character that would flit in and out of our lives depending on where he was traveling in the world. One minute he'd be working on sardine boats in the Mediterranean and the next thing he was living in a cave in southern Morocco right on the edge of the Sahara. And then one time he came back and he'd been in New Orleans for about 2 or 3 years and he was raving about a piano player that he would see called Professor Longhair, and that name just always really tickled me, Professor Longhair. So I was probably 10 or 11 years old at that time. And when I'd go up and stay with him and visit he had piles of New Orleans 45s that he'd brought back in suitcases and we'd spend hours .. he knew I was interested and gave me a lot of encouragement and say you should hear this, and check this out. So I got a great education in New Orleans R&B from him. He had 45s by Professor Longhair and Clarence Henry, Smiley Lewis, all kinds of great people. Obscure bands like Jiving Gene and the Jokers that still people don't talk about. So that was the stuff that I really liked. Part of the appeal perhaps was because it was so rare. No one else knew anything about it. No one else at my school had ever heard of Professor Longhair. No one in England had ever heard of Professor Longhair. There were no 'Fess albums then, just 45s... So anyway, I learned from records. I didn't know it was funk at the time. It was just very syncopated music that spoke of something exotic to a young child in England in the 1970's. ”

--Jon Cleary March 12, 2020