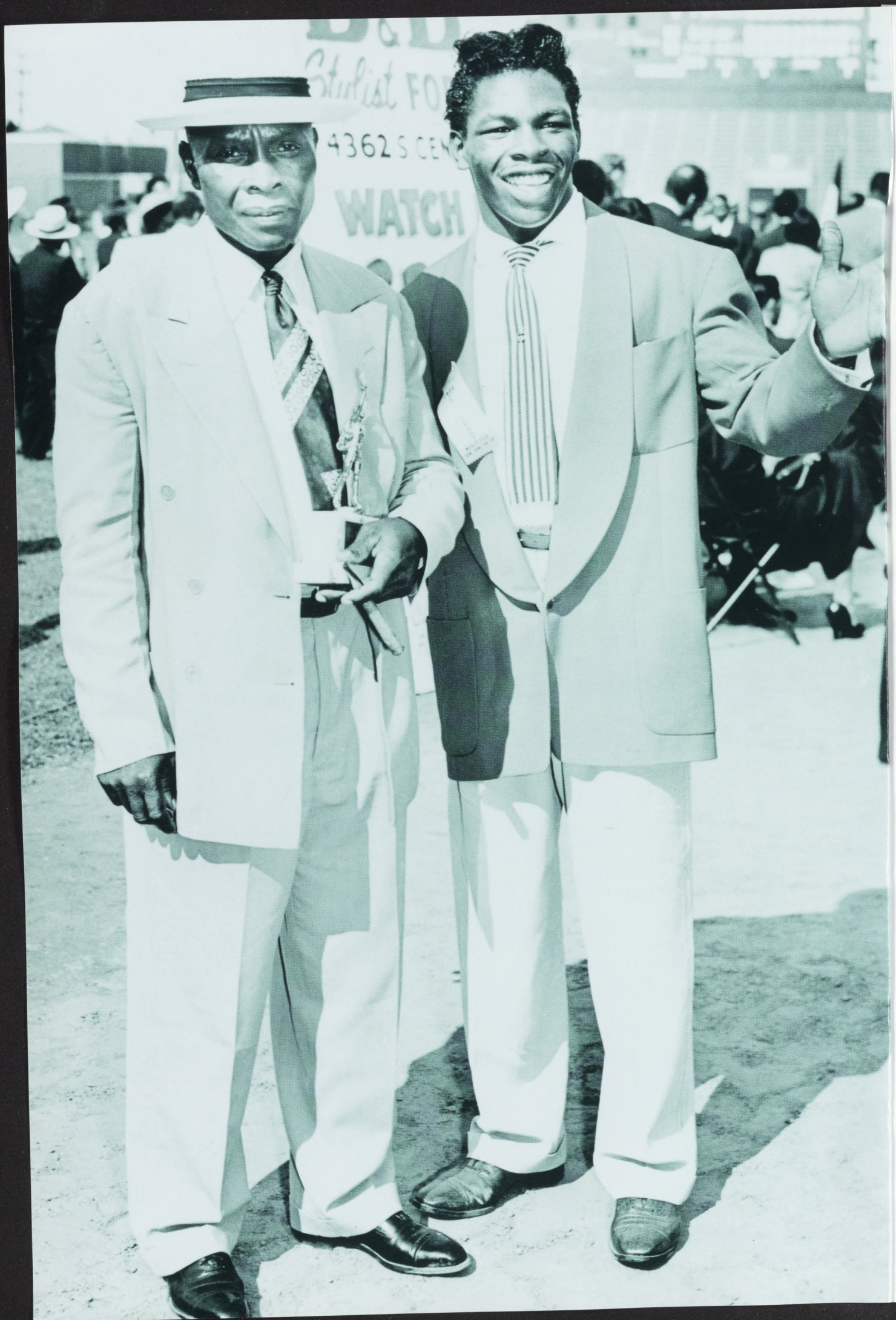
LLOYD PRICE

IT'S A SAD AND FAMILIAR STORY: A PRODIGIOUSLY GIFTED BLACK rhythm & blues singer rises from poverty and oppression to overnight success. He sees others enriched by his record sales and publishing income as he struggles to survive. He never makes the transition to "civilian life" when his musical career fades . . . and lives out his last years in threadbare obscurity. ℭ Yes, it's a sad and familiar story . . . *but it's not the Lloyd Price story.* ℭ Lloyd Price was born March 9, 1933, in the New Orleans suburb of Kenner, Louisiana, the eighth in a family of eleven children. As a child, he sang in the choir of the Pilgrim Baptist Church in Kenner – where in the Nineties a street was renamed Lloyd Price Avenue. When they were just teenagers, Lloyd and his brother Leo formed a band and were soon featured on the WBOK radio show hosted by popular disc jockey Okey Dokey. ℭ "Okey Dokey's sponsor was Maxwell House Coffee," Price recalls, "and he had this phrase he used all the time: *'Lawdy Miss Clawdy, Mother's homemade pies and Maxwell House Coffee.'* I took that and made a song out of it. And that rhythm, that slow rockin' thing? Well, we just could not play the popular beats of Louis Jordan and Roy Brown – the shuffle, the boogie-woogie. My brother Leo would bang on a pot and get his own rhythm going. 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy' took that rhythm worldwide." ℭ One fateful day in early 1952, bandleader, songwriter and A&R man Dave Bartholomew

Lloyd Price first rocketed to stardom in 1952 with "Lawdy Miss Clawdy"

BY ANDREW SCHWARTZ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stopped by the sandwich shop run by Lloyd's mother. "Dave heard me banging the song out on the piano and told me he liked it. Later he brought Art Rupe of Specialty Records to my house. I played the tune for Art, and he said, 'Great, I'll meet you at Cosimo [Matassa]'s studio in two weeks.' "

The relaxed but powerful groove of Bartholomew's band (with Earl Palmer on drums and Fats Domino on piano) fit Lloyd's soulful tenor like a glove. "One rehearsal, one take, and that was it!" says Price with a chuckle. By June 1952, "Lawdy Miss Clawdy" was the Number One R&B record in America. It enjoyed enormous sales and years of popularity, and may be the only song ever covered by both Elvis Presley and the Beatles. More importantly, "Lawdy Miss Clawdy" was a crucial step in the transformation of rhythm & blues into rock & roll.

"I revolutionized the South. Before 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy,' white kids were not really interested in this music. People like Charles Brown and Fats Domino really only sold to the black community. But ten months after I was in business, they were putting up ropes to divide the white and black spectators. But by ten o'clock at night, they'd all be together on that dance floor."

Price's skyrocketing career crashed to earth in November 1953, when he was drafted into the army and sent to the Far East. "My draft board down in Louisiana told me, 'You *have* to go into the service, because Washington, D.C., don't understand what a "Lawdy Clawdy" is and what you're doing down here in the South.' " Upon his return to civilian life in October 1955, Price found his original sound "taken by Fats Domino and Little Richard. That's when I decided to do the ballads, like 'Just Because,' and when I formed KRC Records."

KRC was one of the first black artist-owned labels, just as Lloyd & Logan Music (created by Price with longtime friend and concert promoter Harold Logan) was one of the first black artist-owned publishing companies. The new label struck pay dirt in early 1957 with the classic "Just Because," which – via national distribution through ABC-Paramount – overcame a competing cover version recorded for Specialty by Larry Williams, Lloyd's first cousin and former valet.

In 1958 Price signed directly to ABC-Paramount "as the highest-paid artist in the business, *and* as my own song publisher. I got 10 percent when Nat King Cole was only getting 5 percent." His new major-label affiliation and pop music's six years or so of evolution since his start meant that Price was now competing with a host of younger artists, both black and white. He rose to the challenge with a memorable string of sophisticated pop and R&B hits: "Stagger Lee" (Number One R&B and pop), "Where Were You (on Our Wedding Day)?" (Number Four R&B; Number Twenty-three pop), "Personality" (Number One R&B; Number Two pop) and "I'm Gonna Get Married" (Number One R&B; Number Three pop). These recordings sublimated but never entirely submerged Price's New Orleans roots beneath massed strings, big-band horns and female choruses.

Price celebrating success with his father, 1953

In 1963, Price and Logan launched the Double L label. Lloyd hit the charts with a storming rendition of "Misty"; the company also issued Wilson Pickett's first solo recordings. Double L's New York headquarters were on Broadway above Birdland, which the two partners remodeled and reopened in August 1968 as Lloyd Price's Turntable Club ("my whole idea was to get the black acts south of One-Hundred and Tenth Street"). Harold Logan was shot to death in the Double L offices on May 9, 1969, just as the company was preparing to open a string of Turntable Clubs in the South and go into production of a network-television special, *Lloyd Price: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.*

Price recorded sporadically for a variety of labels through the early Seventies but became more consumed with his interest in African culture, trade and politics. He visited Ghana in 1968; lived in Nigeria for several years; and, with Don King, was a principal organizer of the 1974 Muhammad Ali–George Foreman fight in Zaire and its accompanying music festival. These events later were commemorated in the Academy Award–winning documentary *When We Were Kings* and in the acclaimed HBO movie *Don King: Only in America,* in which actor Vondie Curtis Hall portrayed Lloyd Price (and Lou Rawls played the role of Harold Logan). Price's first new studio recording in years – a hip-hop flavored remake of "Personality" coproduced with Brooklyn rapper Freddy Foxx – was used as the TV movie's closing theme.

Price performing recently at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival

Price has reactivated Lloyd & Logan Music and built a multitrack studio near his home in Westchester County, New York. At age sixty-four, he's back in the business, working with a new generation of young songwriters and artists.

In his November 1972 *Rolling Stone* review of Lloyd's *16 Greatest Hits* and *To the Roots and Back* albums, one Daniel Goldberg rhetorically asked, "Isn't Lloyd Price cool?" and went on to note that "it's hard not to be impressed by his historical contribution as a writer and artist." Today, Danny Goldberg is chairman of the Mercury Records Group. And Lloyd Price? He's alive and well . . . and still way cool.

RED BEANS AND ROCK

THE RISE OF NEW ORLEANS ROCK & ROLL

WHERE DO YOU BEGIN TO PICK UP TRACES OF THE HISTORY OF rock & roll in the music of New Orleans? Try starting with the two-fisted pounding of barrelhouse blues piano that dates back to the rough-and-tumble days of the Storyville bawdy houses. Don't forget the jumping rhythms of second-line drumming, a syncopated variation on Nineteenth Century brass band music that has snaked its way down through the decades into countless patterns underlying the American popular music tradition. Add the infusion of Caribbean rhythms that was always a natural element in the heady cultural mix of the most important port city in the Gulf of Mexico. Nail it all down with a tradition of groove-based collective improvisation that had New Orleans groups blasting out rocking rhythms at least as far back as Louis Armstrong's Hot Fives and Sevens. All New Orleans music shares a character that makes generic distinctions at best beside the point and at worst misleading. This city has traditionally been an artistic refuge throughout the Deep South, at once drawing everything to itself as the center of commerce linking the American agricultural heartland along the Mississippi River with the sea routes of world traders, and at the same

Fats Domino helped to establish the New Orleans sound in 1949 with "The Fat Man"

BY JOHN SWENSON

Shirley & Lee sold a million copies of "Let the Good Times Roll" in 1956

time isolating itself from the rest of the politically and religiously oppressive region through its cosmopolitan nature and reputation for moral license.

In other cities where early rock & roll emerged, it has been easier to see the line of demarcation and even to identify the specific influences that define the mythic "shotgun wedding of country and rhythm & blues." But New Orleans rock & roll is musically indistinguishable from New Orleans rhythm & blues. As early as 1947 Roy Brown had recorded the hit single "Good Rockin' Tonight" in New Orleans.

Antoine "Fats" Domino, by far the most popular New Orleans rock & roller in terms of records sold, already had his sound down in 1949 when he recorded the impressive debut single "The Fat Man," a rewrite of the traditional barrelhouse piano standard "Junker's Blues." The rhythmic urgency of Domino's piano playing is in full force here, as is his joyful, shouting vocal, a performance so exciting it leads him to utter exuberant scat choruses.

Domino's identification with New Orleans is total from this first moment – he's "standing on the corner of Rampart and Canal." Domino celebrated the *joie de vivre* of New Orleans life in the Creole French of "Hey! La Bas Boogie," as tenor saxophonist Lee Allen stirs it up with an explosive one-chorus solo inspired by the high-flying energy of Illinois Jacquet. Another early high point is Domino's cover of Professor Longhair's classic "Mardi Gras in New Orleans."

By the time the rest of the nation was recognizing that a rock & roll boom was underway in 1955, Domino was already a veteran presence on the New Orleans scene. His bandleader and arranger Dave Bartholomew rivaled any hitmaker in rock & roll history for his ability to crank out one gem after another using a pool of outstanding session players including a core band comprised of Allen on tenor saxophone, Alvin "Red" Tyler on baritone sax, Earl Palmer on drums, Frank Fields on bass and several different guitarists and keyboardists.

Bartholomew learned to play trumpet from Peter Davis, who also taught Louis Armstrong, and he played in traditional New Orleans groups. After World War II Bartholomew led one of New Orleans's hottest bands, holding court at legendary nightclubs like the Dew Drop Inn and the Caldonia Inn. When Lew Chudd employed Bartholomew to find, hire and produce New Orleans talent for Imperial Records in 1949, Domino was his first choice.

Though Bartholomew had great success with Domino, several terrific records he made with Overton Amos Lemons, a.k.a. Smiley Lewis, failed to catch on. "I Hear You Knockin'," from 1955, was successfully covered right away by Gale Storm, then again in 1970 by British rocker Dave Edmunds. Elvis Presley successfully covered a cleaned-up version of "One Night (of Sin)."

Bartholomew did much better with the teenage couple Shirley & Lee. Leonard Lee and Shirley Goodman were sixteen when the Bartholomew-directed "I'm Gone" introduced them to the public in 1952. The duo went on to sell a million copies of their 1956 hit "Let the Good Times Roll."

In a primitive recording studio in the back of engineer Cosimo Matassa's J&M Record Shop, classic 1950s sides for Ace, Minit, Imperial and other labels were made around the clock. It was, in fact, the only studio in New Orleans. The Matassa productions tended to be rhythmically intense with heavily over-amped guitars playing in-unison riffs with the bass and horns, creating a heavy, dance-oriented bottom – a musical style that became known as "the New Orleans sound."

"From about '48 to '56 there were so many sessions being cut in New Orleans there was more work than the cats could handle," recalls Mac Rebennack, a guitar player and session leader on many Matassa studio recordings who went on to solo fame as Dr. John.

Ernie K-Doe hit the big time with the Number One song "Mother-in-Law"

"There were sessions going on damn near twenty-four hours a day, six, seven days a week. All the cats you could mention from just about any label from Atlantic to Pacific were cutting in New Orleans."

Henry Roeland "Roy" Byrd, the legendary Professor Longhair, released a series of highly influential singles during the Fifties and early Sixties, including several Atlantic sides (most notably his signature tune "Tipitina") after Ahmet Ertegun and Herb Abramson witnessed his live act at an Algiers juke joint in 1949. Byrd, whose rollicking two-handed style incorporated a heavy rhumba backbeat, came out of the New Orleans piano tradition that stretched back to Jelly Roll Morton and left his stamp on all who followed, including Huey "Piano" Smith, Domino, Dr. John and the consummate producer and songwriter Allen Toussaint.

Professor Longhair was also instrumental in fusing the New Orleans R&B/rock & roll tradition with the familiar cadences of the Mardi Gras Indians with his recording of "Big Chief," featuring Earl King on vocals. Robert Parker, the saxophonist in Longhair's group, went on to solo success in the mid-Sixties with "Barefootin'."

Though Longhair's influence runs deep, he was not a well-known national figure during the heyday of New Orleans rock & roll. Little Richard, on the other hand, came bursting out of New Orleans with his own wild take on barrelhouse piano and took the rock & roll world by storm.

Little Richard was only one of several veins of New Orleans gold struck by Specialty Records owner Art Rupe. Rupe scored big on his first visit to New Orleans in 1952 when he discovered the teenage Lloyd Price singing "Lawdy Miss Clawdy." With Fats Domino sitting in on piano, the J&M Studio recording of "Lawdy Miss Clawdy" topped the R&B charts and sold a million records. Price was drafted in 1953 and never repeated that success with Specialty, though he went on to record several rock-era hits with other companies, including "Just Because," "Stagger Lee" and "Personality."

Rupe cashed in again with the glorious 1954 hit by Eddie "Guitar Slim" Jones, "The Things That I Used to Do," which became another million-seller. But the Little Richard sessions for Specialty identified the magic of the New Orleans sound once and for all.

Richard Penniman had already recorded unsuccessfully when Rupe sent him to New Orleans with A&R rep Robert "Bumps" Blackwell to cut some tracks with the J&M "clique" in September 1955. The session included the Palmer/Fields rhythm section, Tyler and Allen on horns, Justin Adams on guitar and most likely Huey Smith on piano. During a session break, Little Richard was fooling around on the piano, playing a raunchy version of what would become "Tutti-Frutti." A local songwriter who happened to be there penned some cleaned-up lyrics for "Tutti-Frutti," the song that launched the career of one of the original rock & rollers. The list of tracks Richard went on to cut in New Orleans with the clique is a virtual greatest-hits package: "Long Tall Sally," "Slippin' and Slidin'," "Rip It Up," "Ready Teddy," "The Girl Can't Help It," "Jenny Jenny" and "Good Golly Miss Molly" are just some of the titles.

Professor Longhair, here in 1973, began recording in the Fifties

The Chicago-based Chess Records also mined New Orleans gold through the influence of local A&R rep Paul Gayten, who recorded on his own but struck paydirt in 1957 with a catchy novelty song about a frog and a homeless girl, "Ain't Got No Home," by Clarence "Frog Man" Henry. Gayten also recorded Bobby Charles, whose "Later Alligator" was adapted into the Bill Haley and the Comets hit "See You Later, Alligator."

When Specialty talent scout Johnny Vincent left to form his own company, Ace, taking several Specialty artists with him, the New Orleans sound had its first local record company. Earl

King's "Those Lonely, Lonely Nights," the first hit for the fledgling label, was released in 1955 and eventually sold 250,000 copies.

Among the most legendary Ace groups was Huey "Piano" Smith and the Clowns. Smith was a local session player with a long list of credits to his name when he scored his first hit as a leader with "Rockin' Pneumonia and the Boogie Woogie Flu" in 1957. Smith's star potential was limited because he did not sing on his records – Bobby Marchan is the vocalist on "Rockin' Pneumonia" – but the Clowns had their biggest success in 1958 with the two-sided hit "Don't You Just Know It" and "High Blood Pressure." Smith went on to record with limited success for Imperial, but hit the charts again upon his return to Ace with the dance craze–inspired "Pop-Eye."

Ace ventured into the pop world with the teenage-oriented Jimmy Clanton, a precursor to one of the label's biggest hits, Frankie Ford's 1959 classic "Sea Cruise." The driving single, which hit Number Fourteen on the pop chart, was in fact a Huey "Piano" Smith backing track with Ford singing over it.

Ace also had minor hits with Joe Tex and Eddie Bo. Bo, another in the long line of piano-playing "professors," recorded for a variety of labels and ran sessions around New Orleans. His legendary live performances continue today in a regular stand at Margaritaville in the French Quarter and annual shows at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Bo's best-known recording, "Check Mr. Popeye," helped popularize the New Orleans dance movement in the early 1960s. Recorded for the local New Orleans label Ric Records, "Check Mr. Popeye" received national attention after it was licensed to the Philadelphia-based Swan Records.

Ric, which along with its sister label, Ron Records, was owned by former Ace associate Joe Ruffino, recorded a number of other local New Orleans artists including Professor Longhair and Irma Thomas, but the label's biggest hit was the irresistible Joe Jones recording of "You Talk Too Much," which made it to Number Three on the national charts in 1960 after Roulette Records took over its manufacture, distribution and promotion.

When New Orleans distributor Joe Banashak formed his own label, Minit Records, in 1960, he turned to a young protégé of Bartholomew's, Allen Toussaint, to run his productions. Bartholomew had discovered Toussaint during jam sessions at the Dew Drop Inn and had used Toussaint as the pianist on sessions when Fats Domino was on the road and unavailable to record.

Toussaint, a brilliant writer and arranger as well as a gifted keyboardist, brought the new label into the charts quickly with the 1960 hit "Ooh Poo Pah Doo," a riotous outing by former Professor Longhair drummer Jessie Hill. In 1961 Toussaint worked his magic again, transforming the journeyman New Orleans singer Ernest Kador into the best-selling Ernie K-Doe, whose smash hit "Mother-in-Law" soared to Number One after it was leased for distribution to Imperial.

Georgia native Little Richard struck gold in the Crescent City

Lloyd Price, a 1998 Hall of Fame inductee, was one of New Orleans's first stars

With Imperial distributing Minit, Banashak formed another label, Instant, with Toussaint again handling the sessions. This imprint became synonymous with a series of terrific recordings by Chris Kenner. Kenner's "I Like It Like That" became a Number Two hit in 1961. After scoring with the regional hit "Something You Got," Kenner had another national hit in 1963 with "Land of 1,000 Dances." Though Kenner's original topped out at Number Seventy-seven on the charts, it went on to be an oft-covered song and a hit for Cannibal and the Headhunters.

Lee Dorsey was another Toussaint-produced artist on Instant, but it wasn't until Fire/Fury Records president Bobby Robinson signed Dorsey that he finally put together a hit. Toussaint worked behind the scenes with Robinson and Dorsey on "Ya Ya," which became a million-seller in 1961.

The impact of the Beatles on the American pop music industry in 1963 hit the New Orleans music scene like a killer hurricane. Imperial closed up shop and Bartholomew scaled back his schedule. Toussaint went into the army, and by the time he returned to the scene found that many of the New Orleans session stalwarts had moved to Los Angeles. A golden age had passed, but not without casting a very long shadow.