



[Professor Longhair](#)

Fess: The Professor Longhair Anthology

Rolling Stone: star rating

Community: star rating

By [David Fricke](#)

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Crescent City singer Ernie K-Doe — Number One in 1961 with "Mother-in-Law" — once said, "I'm not sure, but I'm almost positive, that all music came from New Orleans." He's probably right. And all of that music — blues, traditional jazz, R&B and early rock & roll — came together best in the robust hands of Henry Roeland Byrd, a.k.a. Professor Longhair (1918-1980). The nickname was a club owner's idea — Byrd had unusually long hair for 1949 — and a perfect fit. Even in a city so rich in piano magicians, Longhair had few peers (Archibald, Tuts Washington) but many students, including Fats Domino, Allen Toussaint and Dr. John. And while Longhair had only one national hit ("Bald Head," a Top Five R&B single in 1950), he recorded prolifically to the end of his life. *Fess* is a perfect two-CD introduction to his genius, featuring defining performances of his trademark songs. Longhair's rare fusion of boogie-woogie, calypso and the rhythms of second-line parades and Mardi Gras Indian chants was already in place when he made the seminal 1949 and 1953 Atlantic recordings here (anthologized in full on 1972's *New Orleans Piano*). His signature blues "Tipitina" captured the lazy tempo of life in New Orleans' steaming humidity, while the volcanic tangle of funeral-march drums and Longhair's piano became the blueprint for later classics such as "Go to the Mardi Gras" and "Big Chief — Part 2." By the time of the galloping Seventies sessions on Disc Two, with bands of both old friends (Snooks Eaglin, Dr. John) and young bucks, Longhair's explosive originality was a tradition in itself, a fundamental strain of local R&B joy. He remains a constant spirit in the city today. Whenever and wherever a pianist sits down to play, class is in session, and he is the Professor.