

# JON CLEARY

## *Occapella!* FHQ Records

"Having fun with the songs of Allen Toussaint," Jon Cleary has chosen a mix of popular and less familiar pieces penned by legendary songwriter Allen Toussaint to re-imagine, like the lesser-known title track as well as better known tunes like "Southern Nights," "Everything I Do Gonn Be Funky," and "Fortune Teller," most recently made popular by Robert Plant/Alison Krauss.

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## Highlights

★ **2013 OffBeat Best of the Beat Award** Nominee for Best Piano/Keyboardist - an impressive fifth year in a row.

★ **2013 DownBeat Critics Poll** - Jon Cleary's *Occapella* ranked among the Best Blues Albums of the Year

★ **2012 OffBeat Magazine Best of the Beat Award Nominee** for Best Piano/Keyboardist. Band members James Singleton and Matt Perrine were also nominated for Best Bass Player and Best Tuba / Sousaphonist respectively.

★ **2012 Blues Music Award Nominee** - Pinetop Perkins Piano Player of the Year (3rd nomination in this category)

★ **2011 OffBeat Best of the Beat Award Nominee** for Best Piano/Keyboardist

★ **2011** Named among the Best Keyboardists in **Blues Matters (UK) International Writer's Poll**

★ Featured in Season 2, Episode 20 of HBO's *Treme*, performing "Frenchman Street Blues" and Season 1, Episode 9, performing "When You Get Back"

★ Touring member of **Bonnie Raitt's** band since 1999 and appeared on the albums *Silver Lining* and *Souls Alike*. On these recordings, Raitt covered the Cleary originals, "Fool's Game," "Monkey Business," "Unnecessarily Mercenary," and "Love on One Condition."

★ Toured with **John Scofield** and featured on vocals and keyboards on the recently released, *Piety Street by John Scofield & The Piety Street Band*.

★ Recorded with artists such as **Taj Mahal, Keb Mo, Eric Clapton, D'Angelo, India Arie** and **Ryan Adams**, among many others



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*"Jon Cleary is the ninth wonder in the world." - Bonnie Raitt*

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In the hallowed ranks of New Orleans "piano professors," **Jon Cleary** is on the tenure track. Born in England and bred in New Orleans, Jon Cleary is a triple threat combining soulful vocals, masterful piano skills, and a knack for composing infectious grooves with melodic hooks and sharp lyrics. He balances performing on solo piano, with noted funk band **The Absolute Monster Gentlemen**, and his trio **The Philthy Phew**.

"Cleary plays piano as if he's revving up an engine and sings as if a line drawing of his behatted self were next to "soul" in Webster's."

- *The Washington Post*

"Cleary can be an absolute monster on his own, but Cleary's full combo R&B is as broad, deep and roiling as the Mississippi river, the combined swinging product of local keyboard tradition, Cleary's vocal-songwriting flair for moody Seventies soul and the spunky-Meters roll of his Gentlemen."

- *Rolling Stone*

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## Occapella! APRIL 17, 2012

The seeds for Jon Cleary's sixth solo CD were sown when the acclaimed songwriter, pianist and singer was asked the hypothetical question, "Would you ever do a record of somebody else's tunes?" The English-born Cleary, who has made New Orleans his home for more than three decades, provides his emphatic answer with the utterly captivating Occapella.

An exploration deep into the bountiful songbook of Cleary's musical touchstone, Allen Toussaint, the new album is as inspired as it is sure-footed. On this labor of love, Cleary inventively reimagines the classics "Southern Nights" and "What Do You Want the Girl To Do," while he presents less familiar pieces like "Poor Boy Got To Move," "I'm Gone" and "When the Party's Over" as newly unearthed treasures.

"I wouldn't say it's a tribute," Cleary says of Occapella. "The term 'tribute' sounds rather corny, really. On the back of the album, I just put, 'Having fun with the songs of Allen Toussaint,' which sums up the vibe a bit better. Toussaint's music was the soundtrack of my adolescence, I've played a lot of his songs with the guys who had the original hits with them, and we've crossed paths on numerous occasions. So this record was a logical thing for me to do.

"I'd actually been messing around with a song of his called 'Occapella,' which he wrote for Lee Dorsey in the '70s," Cleary says of the project's genesis. "It's always been one of my favorites, so I started to do an a cappella version of 'Occapella,' and then one thing led to another. The idea of flexing my various musical muscles using Allen Toussaint's songs as the raw material seemed really appealing. The challenge was to take each song and do a flip on it in some respect."

Cleary plays every instrument on the album - keyboards, guitar (his first instrument), bass and drums - with one notable exception. On the ecstatically soulful opening track "Let's Get Low Down," Bonnie Raitt and Dr. John, both longtime musical associates, join him on vocals. Dr. John also plays guitar on the track, while bassist James Singleton and

drummer Terence Higgins, both part of the flexible lineup of the Philthy Phew, lay down the deep gut groove.

Additionally, Jeffrey "Jellybean" Alexander, Derwin "Big D" Perkins and Cornell Williams of Cleary's Absolute Monster Gentlemen contribute backing vocals on "Popcorn Pop Pop," "Wrong Number" and the title song, while Walter "Wolfman" Washington sings background vocals on "Everything I Do Gonh Be Funky." Cleary self-produced Occapella in the well-appointed studio he's installed in his home in the Bywater neighborhood of New Orleans. His neighbor, fellow expat John Porter - a veteran producer whose CV ranges from The Smiths and Ryan Adams to B.B. King, Buddy Guy and R.L. Burnside - received a co-producer credit for his expert assistance.

"My inclination at first was to pick the most obscure tunes I could find, because I've always been a bit of a funk detective," Cleary explains. "Then one of my managers said, 'It's a great idea, but if you're gonna do this, make sure there are some songs that people recognize.' So I picked a couple of his better-known tunes, but I tried to take them in a different direction - to take an aspect of the melody or the chord progression, or perhaps his original arrangement, and present it in a different box, as it were."

Cleary became aware of Toussaint as a youngster in the village of Cranbrook in Kent, England, when he noticed that three of his favorite songs - Frankie Miller's rendition of "Brickyard Blues," Robert Palmer's "Sneakin' Sally Through the Alley" and LaBelle's "Lady Marmalade" - were all credited to the New Orleans legend. When his uncle gave him a copy of Toussaint's classic 1972 LP, *Life, Love and Faith*, Cleary was hooked for life. Soon after finishing school, he made a pilgrimage to the Crescent City and knew he'd found his spiritual home. He "got thrown in the deep end, landing a job digging up banana trees and pretty much moving into the Maple Leaf Bar," where he sat transfixed night after night listening to the likes of James Booker and Roosevelt Sykes tickle the ivories on the house piano. Before long, he was mixing it up with Dr. John, Snooks Eaglin, Earl King and other staples of the scene on club stages and in local studios.

As his reputation spread, Cleary became a hired gun for NOLA-based musicians and visiting artists alike, from Taj Mahal and Keb' Mo' to India Arie and Ryan Adams. He recorded and toured with renowned guitarist/bandleader John Scofield, and spent 10 years playing with Raitt, who recorded several of his songs, before regretfully taking his leave from that altogether gratifying situation in order to concentrate on his own music.

Though the new album is a departure from his previous recordings, which have focused all but exclusively on his own material, it has enabled him to come full circle in terms of his lifelong musical passion, exemplified by his sublime take on "Everything I Do Gonh Be Funky." "That song will forever be associated with Lee Dorsey, who was Toussaint's protégé," Cleary points out. "Lots of other people have covered it as well, but I didn't care - I just wanted to play it because it's such a great song. The first time I heard it, I said to myself, 'Yeah - everything I do is gonh be funky too.'"

To say that Jon Cleary has made good on that vow would amount to a gross understatement.

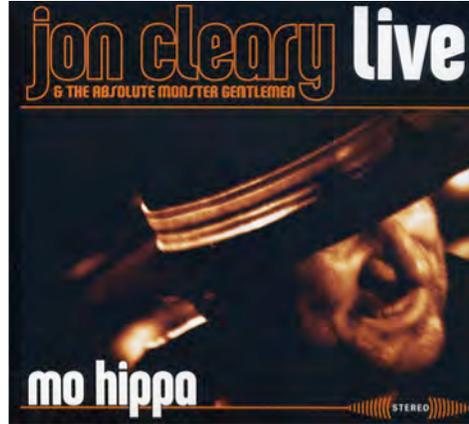
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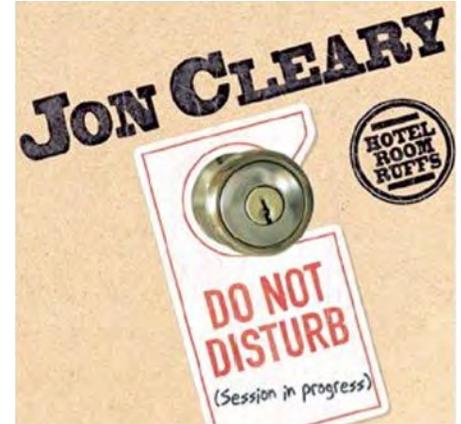
# Discography



**Occapella!**  
(2012)



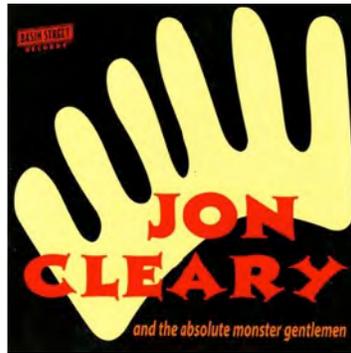
**Mo Hippa**  
(2008)



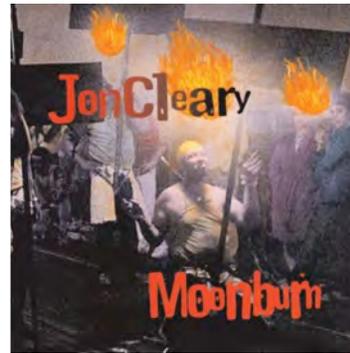
**Do Not Disturb EP**  
(2007)



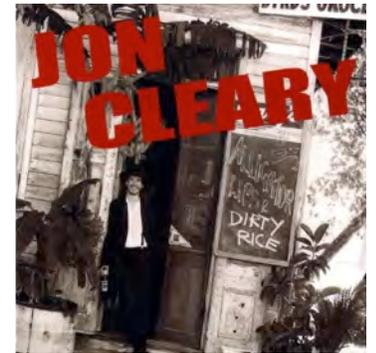
**Pin Your Spin**  
(2004)



**Jon Cleary & the Absolute Monster Gentlemen**  
(2002)



**Moonburn**  
(1999)



**Alligator Lips & Dirty Rice**  
(1994)

## Quotes

New Orleans has always been piano man's heaven. But the most creative keyboardist in town, for my money, is Jon Cleary.

- *Mojo Magazine*

Having lived in New Orleans for two decades, Cleary is steeped in that city's second-line tradition, but he is equally influenced by the moody grooves of '70s Miami soul.

- *Amazon*

Cleary's playing style -- the settings on his digital keyboard switched from ivory-hued piano to gritty clavinet and back -- mixes Professor Longhair, Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder into one rolling gumbo. Like any Crescent City pianist, he's always ready to rumba.

- *The Star Ledger, New Jersey*

Jon Cleary's got a specialty: funk-drenched New Orleans piano.

- *Boston Herald*

Cleary doesn't skimp on soulfulness, either. The ghost of Lee Dorsey hovers over the stripped-down title tune.

- *The Times / London*

Combining doo-wop, gospel, the Cuban Son tradition, blues and - above all - a heavy dollop of P-Funk bass-quake, Cleary and his band...considerably spice up the already-rich N'awlins piano gumbo.

- *Paste Magazine*

Quite possibly the tightest funkier band in a city swarming with such superlatives.

- *OffBeat Magazine*

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