

Allen Toussaint - Southern Nights (1975)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Last Train* 3:01 2 *Worldwide* 2:42 3 *Back In Baby's Arms* 4:49 4 *Country John* 4:45
5 *Basic Lady* 2:58 6 *Southern Nights* 3:36 7 *You Will Not Lose* 3:42 8 *What Do You
Want The Girl To Do?* 3:40 9 *When The Party's Over* 2:38 10 *Cruel Way To Go Down*
3:52 Allen Toussaint - Guitar, Harmonica, Keyboards, Piano, Vocals (Background) Teddy
Royal - Guitar Leo Nocentelli - Guitar Charles Victor Moore - Guitar Arthur "Red" Neville -
Organ George Porter, Jr. - Bass Jim Moore - Flute, Sax (Tenor) Carl Blouin - Sax (Baritone)
Gary Brown - Sax (Tenor) Steve Howard - Trumpet Claude Kerr, Jr. - Flugelhorn, Trumpet
Lester Caliste - Trombone Joan Harmon - Vocals (Background) Sharon Neborn - Vocals
(Background) Deborah Paul - Vocals (Background) Clyde Williams - Drums Alfred "Uganda"
Roberts - Congas

Allen Toussaint produced a kind of masterpiece with his first Reprise album, *Life, Love and Faith*, finding previously unimagined variations on his signature New Orleans R&B sound. For its 1975 sequel, *Southern Nights*, he went even further out, working with producer Marshall Sehorn to create a hazy vague concept album that flirted with neo-psychedelia while dishing out his deepest funk and sweetest soul. It's a bit of an unfocused album, but that's largely due to the repeated instrumental "filler," usually based on the theme of the title song, that pops up between every two or so songs, undercutting whatever momentum the album is building. That, along with a song or two that are merely average Toussaint, prevents *Southern Nights* from being a full-fledged masterpiece, but it comes close enough to that level of distinction anyway due to the brilliance of its best songs. There is, of course, "Southern Nights," which Glen Campbell later took to the top of the charts, but it's nearly unrecognizable here, given a swirling, trippy arrangement that plays like a heat mirage. It's rivalled by the exquisite "What Do You Want the Girl to Do?," later covered by both Bonnie Raitt and Boz Scaggs, neither of which equal the beautiful, sighing resignation of Toussaint's impeccable vocal performance. Then, there are the songs that weren't covered, but should have been, like the nearly anthemic "Back in Baby's Arm," the rolling, catchy "Basic Lady," the stately "You Will Not Lose," or the steady-grooving end-of-the-night "When the Party's Over." Then, there are the songs that perhaps only Toussaint could sing, given their complex yet nimble grooves: witness how "Country John" seems like a simple, straight-ahead New Orleans raver but really switches tempo and rhythm

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over the course of the song, or how the monumental "Last Train" builds from its spare, funky opening to a multi-layered conclusion boasting one of Toussaint's best horn arrangements and vocal hooks. These disparate sounds may not be tied together by the interludes, as they were intended, but they nevertheless hold together because they're strong songs all bearing Toussaint's unmistakable imprint. They're so good that they nearly knock the "near" off the near-masterpiece status for Southern Nights, and they're the reason why the album should be a part of any serious soul collection. --- Stephen Thomas Erlewine, Rovi

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