



# Ernie K-Doe: The R&B Emperor of New Orleans (Louisiana Musicians Biography)

*Ben Sandmel*

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May 1961, and one tune was sitting pretty atop both the R&B and pop charts: Mother-in-Law became the first hit by a New Orleans artist to rule black and white airwaves alike. Ernie K-Doe was only twenty-five years old, and his reign was just beginning. Born in New Orleans's Charity Hospital, K-Doe came of age in a still-segregated South. He built his musical chops singing gospel in church, graduating to late-night gigs on the city's backstreets. He practiced self-projection, reinvention, shedding his surname, Kador, for the radio-friendly tag K-Doe. He coined his own dialect, heavy on hyperbole, and created his own pantheon, placing himself front and center: There have only been five great singers of rhythm & blues Ernie K-Doe, James Brown, and Ernie K-Doe! Decades after releasing his one-and-only chart-topper, he crowned himself Emperor of the Universe. A decade after his death, lovers of New Orleans music remain his loyal subjects. Journalist Ben Sandmel takes readers backstage in this intimately framed biography. Here are all the highs: Billboard raves, rock-star parties, a string of early hits that remain local staples. And here are the lows: profligate spending, go-nowhere releases, and years lost to alcohol. And here, too, is the magical second act: a radio show with a cult following, a new generation of protégés, and a fresh lease on life and love. In its broad outlines, K-Doe's story parallels that of his beloved, beleaguered city. He rose, fell, and rose again, weathering storms and lingering long after most considered him down for the count. In the end, he literally rose from the dead: an eerily lifelike statue of K-Doe held court at his castle, the Mother-in-Law Lounge, for years after his 2001 passing. Volume two in the Louisiana Musicians Biography Series, *Ernie K-Doe: R&B Emperor of New Orleans* features exclusive interviews with Ernie, Antoinette, and more than a hundred musicians, friends, and family members. The series, launched in 2010, exemplifies The Historic New Orleans Collection's commitment to preserving and celebrating the region's unique musical culture.

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