

Sonny Landreth - Down In Louisiana (2011)

Written by bluesever

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01 – Ay Ai Ai [play](#) 02 – Sugar Cane [play](#) 03 – I Had A Dream 04 – Without My Baby 05 – Congo Square 06 – Checking Up On My Baby 07 – The Parish Line 08 – Little India 09 – If I Ever Get Lucky 10 – Everybody's Breakin' Everybody's Heart

Personnel: Sonny Landreth - vocals, guitar Dave Ransom - bass Mel Milton - vocals, harmonicas Mike Binet – Drums

Southwest Louisiana-based guitarist, songwriter, and singer Sonny Landreth is a musician's musician. The blues slide guitar playing found on his two Zoo Entertainment releases, *Outward Bound* (1992) and *South of I-10* (1995) is distinctive and unlike anything else you've ever heard. His unorthodox guitar style comes from the manner in which he simultaneously plays slide and makes fingering movements on the fretboard. Landreth, who has an easygoing personality, can play it all, like any good session musician. His distinctive guitar playing can be heard on recordings by John Hiatt, Leslie West and Mountain, and other rock & rollers.

Landreth was born February 1, 1951, in Canton, Mississippi, and his family lived in Jackson, Mississippi, for a few years before settling in Lafayette, Louisiana. Landreth began playing guitar after a long tenure with the trumpet. His earliest inspiration came from Scotty Moore, the guitarist from Elvis Presley's band, but as time went on, he learned from the recordings of musicians and groups like Chet Atkins and the Ventures. As a teen, Landreth began playing with his friends in their parents' houses.

"They would ping-pong us from one house to another, and though we were all awful at first, as time went on we got pretty good. It's an evolutionary process, just like songwriting is," Landreth explained in an interview on his 44th birthday in 1995. After his first professional gig with accordionist Clifton Chenier in the '70s (where he was the only white guy in the Red Beans & Rice Revue for awhile), Landreth struck out on his own, but not before he recorded two albums

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for the Blues Unlimited label out of Crowley, Louisiana, Blues Attack in 1981 and Way Down in Louisiana in 1985. If anyone is living proof of the need to press on in spite of obstacles, it is Landreth. The second of those two albums got him noticed by some record executives in Nashville, which in turn led to his recording and touring work with John Hiatt. That led to still more work with John Mayall, who recorded Landreth's radio-ready "Congo Square." More recently, he's worked with New Orleans bandleader and pianist Allen Toussaint (who guests on several tracks on South of I-10, as does Dire Straits guitarist Mark Knopfler).

On Landreth's brilliant albums for Zoo, the lyrics draw the listener in to the sights, sounds, smells, and heat of southwest Louisiana, and a strong sense of place is evident in many of Landreth's songs. Although his style is completely his own and his singing is more than adequate, Landreth admits that writers like William Faulkner have had a big influence on his lyric writing. The fact that it's taken so long for academics at American universities to recognize the great body of poetry to be found in the blues concerns Landreth as well. Robert Johnson is Landreth's big hero when it comes to guitar playing. "When I finally discovered Robert Johnson, it all came together for me," Landreth said, noting that he also closely studied the recordings of Skip James, Mississippi John Hurt, and Charley Patton. ---Richard Skelly, AMG

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