



**Jon E. Edwards (December 30, 1964) American soul singer**

**Born:** December 30, 1964

*Origin:* Los Angeles, California

*Occupations:* Singer, songwriter, actor, director, producer

*Associated Acts:* Pending Spectrums (1977-1980)

Uptown Atomics (1980-1990)

Jon E. Edwards and the Sophisticates (1990-1998)

Jon E. Edwards and the Internationals 1998-2006 Flattop Records

Solo 2006-Present

*Associated Labels:* Slash Records; CBS Records; Flat Top Records; Mr. Smoothie

**Years active** 1980s–present

**Jon E. Edwards** (born December 30, 1964) is the name of an American singer, actor, and director who gained notoreity as a punk-rock-soul singer in the downtown club scenes of Los Angeles, New York City, and London in the 1980s. He later added actor and film producer to his list of occupations, appearing in the award-winning documentary *Jon E. Edwards Is in Love* and producing the 2013 film “Mr. Sophistication” starring Harry Lennix and Tatum O’Neal

## Early life

Edwards was born in Los Angeles, California, to Wilbur Edwards of San Marcos, Texas, and Auvillia Renee Johnson Edwards of Beaumont, Texas. In the late 1970s and early 1980s he teamed up with friends and fellow Los Angeleans Mark Stewart (better known as Stew), most notably the founder of the band The Negro Problem and author of the Broadway musical *Passing Strange*; Art Terry, and Chuck Mosley (later, lead singer of Faith No More and hardcore punk band Bad Brains “learning how to songwrite together,” according to Edwards. His first band, the Pending Spectrums, started with Art Terry and Stew while they were students at Fairfax High School in Los Angeles. The band played in colleges throughout the greater Los Angeles area. While in high school Edwards met David Oliver, a composer and songwriter whom he would reconnect with in college.

## Musical Career

After attending California State University, Northridge, and Los Angeles City College, Edwards moved to New York City and immersed himself in the downtown art scene, meeting and spending time with artists such as abstract expressionists Al Loving and Bill Hutson (Edwards’ uncle); graffiti artist Futura 2000; hip-hop pioneer Fab Five Freddy; and “radiant child” Jean-Michel Basquiat. Inspired, Edwards founded the band the Uptown Atomics in 1980, bringing Oliver into the band as a songwriter. It was during this time he developed a style of songwriting—punk-soul—that would remain his signature to this day.



The Uptown Atomics were signed to cut demos for Slash Records, an independent Los Angeles-based label responsible for such local Southern California acts as The Blasters, Los Lobos, and X. The Uptown Atomics began playing in underground and alternative music venues such as the Mudd Club, CBGBs, and the

Peppermint Lounge, navigating a pre-gentrified New York City downtown preserved in such films as *Stranger than Paradise*, *Downtown 81*, *After Hours*, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, and *No Picnic*, to which Edwards contributed music for the soundtrack.

During his downtown sojourn, Edwards met Neneh Cherry and musician and club impresario Chris Sullivan, who told him “to go to London and get hip to the sound over there. So I went,” says Edwards. He got a residency at Sullivan’s Wag Club in Soho, a spot that changed music, atmosphere, and even clientele every night. He remained in London for a year and a half, signing with CBS International and writing and recording songs.

During that time he returned to New York City to headline the seminal Terminal Show. Held at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, more than 550 hip-hop and graffiti artists showed their work in what had once been one of the largest buildings in the world.

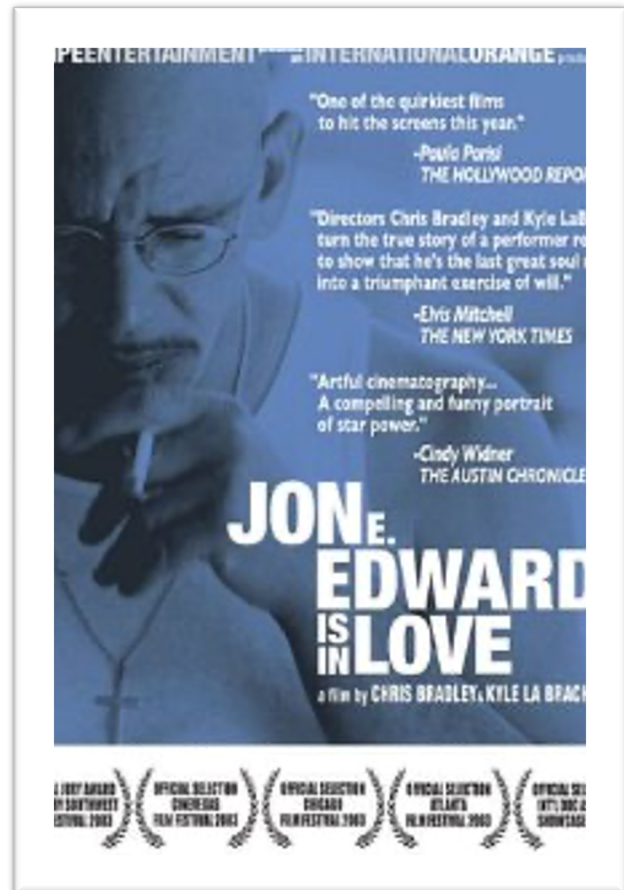
Edwards returned to New York City fully in 1984, doing residencies in clubs such as The Tunnel, taking a side trip into acting in an off-Broadway company. “I played Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly* at Charas Theater in the East Village.” He says. He also performed as Schaunard, rechristened Fillmore, in 1990 in *The Bohemian* at the St. Mark’s Theater, in a remake of Puccini’s *La Boheme*.

In the same year, Edwards, with Jean-Paul Bourelly Greg Tate, Bevis Griffin, Vernon Reid, and, traveled to Europe as the Black Rock Coalition (BRC) Founded in 1985, the BRC is a New York-based artists' collective and non-profit organization that nurtures the creative freedom of black artists.

Edwards went solo in 1991, bringing together, as The Sophisticates, Fred Cash, Marcus Persioni, Kevin Johnson, Toby Williams, and Alan Burroughs, Kenny “Oilcan” Kirschner, Martha Redbone, and Michael Campbell. Backed by a large band with a section led by Donny McCaslin and Rampton, Edwards began playing numerous high profile gigs at the Pierre, Nell’s, New Museum, Rex, New York Palladium, and Club USA. At this time started doing production work on films, soundtracks for television, and acting in such as *Law & Order*

Around 1996 Edwards left New York returned to California to start working for studios as a production assistant and director. It was then he started, with west coast band, the Internationals, and a solo album *The Only Game in Town*, Flattop Records, which Edwards produced and co-wrote. In 1998 he to film work, co-producing and acting in called *Johnny B. Good* starring in and by Richard Brooks and featuring Vonetta Edwards also wrote some of the songs appeared on the soundtrack.

Throughout the 1990s Edwards



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continued to do residencies in high profile venues across the United States, traveling back and forth between New York and Los Angeles. While in L.A. he was introduced to Internet entrepreneur Patrick and Chris Bradley; After seeing Edwards perform while on tour in Los Angeles, the Bradley brothers were intrigued by the singer's "left of the dial" musical agenda, and decided to film him over a weekend. That weekend stretched into three years, and out of it came *Jon E. Edwards Is in Love*, documenting Edwards' struggle to find legitimacy as a soul man, while at the same time taking care of his dying mother.

The film premiered in 2003 to critical success, winning the Special Jury Award at South by Southwest and subsequently a total of 20 awards. The film since has become an underground favorite is scheduled to be re-released in 2014 with an original soundtrack by Edwards.



In 2007 Edwards returned to London and began work on his second album *Soul Man in the Underworld*, completed in 2011.

### **Relationship with Coati Mundi**

Around 1978 a teenaged Edwards met the members of Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band and Kid Creole and the Coconuts while the New York-based groups were in Los Angeles, specifically percussionist Coati Mundi. The lifelong friendship was cemented when Edwards moved to New York City, and Mundi and Edwards worked together extensively, with Mundi producing and performing on many of Edwards' tracks.

### **Relationship with Mark Little and Danny Green**

Edwards met producer Mark Little and director Danny Green around 1998, working with them as an associate producer and production assistant or as an actor in *Big Fat Liar* (2002), *Coach Carter* (2005),

*Factory Girl* (2006), *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story* (2009), and *Obsessed* (2009)

After *Obsessed* wrapped, Edwards and Green started writing the screenplay for *Mr. Sophistication*, at the same time creating Mr. Smoothie Company. *Mr. Sophistication*, about a controversial comedian (played by Harry Lennix) trying to make a comeback after a lengthy self-imposed exile, premiered in 2013. A film that takes a "familiar story of second chances and underscores it with the psychology of the artist and a criticism of self-indulgent manhood," *Mr. Sophistication* was executive produced by Lennix, also stars Tatum O'Neal, Robert Patrick, and Richard Brooks.

## Current Projects

Edwards is currently filming a lifestyle show based on world culture and foods called *Jon E. Edwards Eats the World*. He is also shooting a pilot called *The Pope of Avenue B* about a street therapist in the Lower Eastside, produced by Leon Robinson and Joel “JK” Kipnis for Pulse Cinema. Edwards produced and acted in the gospel musical *Revival!*, written and executive produced by Harry Lennix, and directed by Danny Green, with Mali Music, Michelle Williams, Obba Babatundé, Chaka Khan, and Harry Lennix. Jon E. Edwards wrote and produced the movie *TROUBLED WATERS* on BET plus a Mann Robinson Production. A subsidiary of Viacom.

His latest musical piece is “Soul Man In The Underworld”. The punk rock soul man, displays and discusses his legend within the underground music scenes of New York City, Los Angeles and London. The new album is a style change while keeping his punk rock & soul essence. “Soul Man In The Underworld” is a sonically unique album while feeling mainstream at its core. Jon E. uses more of his baritone voice on this album, marking mature and centered performances. He turns phrases with introspection and relaxes in the music's ebbs and flows created by collaborator Mark CoolNerd Unthank.