
BIG CITY Rhythm & BLUES REVIEWS

CHRISTOPHER WYZE & THE TELLERS
Naptown Blues
Big Radio Records

Christopher Wyze has earned the reputation as one of the brightest and best contemporary blues storytellers on the global scene. Having some well-deserved success with his previous albums "Stuck in the Mud" and "Live in Clarksdale" Wyze and his group return with a tribute to two of Indianapolis' greatest blues pioneers, Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell. These two artist's groundbreaking

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money and relationships. Boyle's jazzy guitar complements the sentiment nicely. "My Own Lonesome Blues" is a straight-ahead acoustic blues, with a great harmonica break by Wyze. "Midnight Hour Blues" is another tune that has been covered by a plethora of artists. Everyone from Champion Jack Dupree to Eric

a relationship. "You Got to Reap What You Sow" is taken from the bible and applied here via nice jazzy changes and some well-placed harmonica. The last two songs are centered on incarceration, with "Prison Bound Blues" and "Birthday in Jail." The former features some of Boyle's tasty slide guitar and cool falsetto from

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Joining lead vocalist/harmonica man Wyze on this momentous venture are mainstays John Boyle III on various guitars and Hammond organ and Gerry Murphy on acoustic bass. Produced by Jim Riley, the sessions for this particular album are significant in that the band recorded at Postal Studios in their home of Indianapolis. The location was less than three miles from where Carr and Blackwell first recorded in 1928.

Everything about this album is focused on recreating that authenticity and emotion that emanated from the originators. From the stripped down vocal and instrumental delivery and arrangements of the songs to the 78 RPM references and vintage design packaging, this is a concept album that has been lovingly crafted.

All but the final song were written by the songwriting team of Blackwell and Carr. These are songs that, not only have been cut by many other artists and, hence, have become standards, but they've paved the way for what the blues and Americana music has stood for.

"I'm Going Back to Tennessee" was written by Carr and Blackwell, interpreted by Wyze & The Tellers and drew come in with a nice laid-back ode to love and wanderlust. Wyze interprets the songwriter's original intent well, with the hook "I'm a sweet loving papa and I take my time, going back to Tennessee if it takes my last dime." The title track,

“Naptown Blues,” refers to hip jazz slang for the beloved city of Indianapolis. This was the epicenter of entertainment and culture in Carr and Blackwell’s time and the band builds a solid mid tempo groove that swings.

“How Long-How Long Blues” was one of the legendary team’s biggest hits and it was covered by a number of diverse artists, including B.B. King, Lou Rawls, Dinah Washington and Count Basie. Wyze and company do a nice job with it as well. “The Truth About the Thing” features streetwise lyrics about the pros and cons of money and relationships. Boyle’s jazzy guitar complements the sentiment nicely. “My Own Lonesome Blues” is a straight-ahead acoustic blues, with a great harmonica break by Wyze. “Midnight Hour Blues” is another tune that has been covered by a plethora of artists. Everyone from Champion Jack Dupree to Eric Clapton have done interpretations of it. Wyze and The Tellers create almost a lullaby feel, with sweet touches of Hammond organ and slide guitar.

“Kokomo Blues” was written and recorded by Blackwell in 1928 and was re-styled a decade later by Robert Johnson as “Sweet Home Chicago.” Kokomo, Indiana was a factory town about 50 miles north of Indianapolis. Being that Wyze and The Tellers are state natives they, as with all the songs here, add their own bit of love to the track. “Tired of Your Low Down Ways” is a straight-ahead walking blues about self respect in a relationship. “You Got to Reap What You Sow” is taken from the bible and applied here via nice jazzy changes and some well-placed harmonica. The last two songs are centered on incarceration, with “Prison Bound Blues” and “Birthday in Jail.” The former features some of Boyle’s tasty slide guitar and cool falsetto from Wyze. The concluding track is a band original that’s inspired by Carr’s “Christmas in Jail—Ain’t That a Pain.”

“Naptown Blues” is a stellar release and also a collectible for the original packaging, liner notes, photos, graphics and booklet. You get all the rich backstory and really come to know and connect with, not only Wyze and The Tellers, but the phenomenal music of Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell.

—Eric Harabadian