BLUES IN BRITAIN

The No.1 UK print and digital blues magazine

Issue 300 December 2026 £7.00



These Wicked Rivers

Fire And Folklore

Ten Years After
The Boneshakers
Kevin Burt
Jump 66
Christopher Wyze & The Tellers
Donna Herula

300th Edition
of your favourite Blues magazine

CHRISTOPHER WYZE & THE TELLERS

present

NAPTOWN BLUES

THE SONGS OF LEROY CARR AND SCRAPPER BLACKWELL

Over the past year, Indianapolis musician, singer and archivist Christopher Wyze has researched the lives and music of Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell, who lived most of their lives in his hometown. *Naptown Blues* is Christopher Wyze & The Tellers' acoustic tribute to the songs of Carr and Blackwell. He tells Trevor Hodgett the story of these two great songwriters and bluesmen.

"I bet people in England and Ireland know Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell better than people here in Indianapolis where they lived. They are forgotten," sighs singer Christopher Wyze who with his band The Tellers has released ***Naptown Blues: Songs Of Leroy Carr & Scrapper Blackwell***, a tribute to the piano/guitar duo. That the two men might now be forgotten in their home town is truly shocking for in the twenties and thirties they recorded songs like 'How Long - How Long Blues', 'Blues Before Sunrise' and 'When The Sun Goes Down' which were big-sellers and became blues standards.

"It troubles me," acknowledges Wyze who is himself a resident of Indianapolis – or Naptown - as are his two band members, guitarist John Boyle III and bassist Gerry Murphy. "There's not a handful of people in Indianapolis who know them. They haven't been to their gravestones like I have, or to see where they first recorded [or] where Leroy lived, [or] where Scrapper was discovered dead in an alley…they don't know any of this. The two guys are forgotten, the Indianapolis influence on blues is forgotten and I think blues is a bit forgotten in America. Thank goodness for you in Europe keeping the blues alive."

Wyze explains what he admires about the music of Carr and Blackwell: "I'm divided from them by a hundred years but I love their blues. When I listen to them I hear more of a delicate approach than popular bluesmen today. And they were different for their time as well: they didn't come out of the South, they weren't sitting down to play music after working in the fields all day and being weary and worn down. They played city blues and their music was more contemporary to the Roaring Twenties - they'd been out and maybe stayed up too late having fun! I've great respect for what they did, I love their story and I feel like I know them and I'm trying to put the spotlight back on some of their music."

Since Leroy Carr wrote and sang virtually all the duo's songs, some listeners regard Scrapper Blackwell as a junior partner. Not Wyze, however. "Listen to 'Kokomo Blues'. That's a Scrapper Blackwell tune and it was good enough that Robert Johnson used it to make 'Sweet Home Chicago'! And he was doing some mighty cool stuff on guitar that has influenced many, many people so I don't think he was a junior partner. I give them equal billing!"

Although Leroy Carr played piano, Wyze doesn't use a pianist on the album. "Gerry Murphy, John Boyle and I have played together for many years so it's very natural for us to play with just guitar and bass. And we wanted it to be all Indianapolis: Leroy and Scrapper are from there and Gerry, John and I are from there - but we didn't have a keyboard player from Indianapolis so there was no question of including keys!" says Wyze.



Of Carr and Blackwell's best-known songs, 'How Long - How Long Blues', which has been interpreted by Eric Clapton, Lead Belly and B.B. King, amongst thousands of others, is included. Surprisingly, however, 'Blues Before Sunrise', which has been interpreted by the likes of Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker and, again, Eric Clapton, and 'When The Sun Goes Down', which has been interpreted by Ray Charles, Van Morrison et al, aren't. Wyze explains how the tracks were selected:

"'Naptown Blues', that's about Indianapolis. Gotta have that one! 'Kokomo Blues', that's a town just up the road. Gotta have that one! But there's a practical aspect too. It costs money to make records so we started with the songs that are in the public domain – this is a labour of love but that keeps [the album within] the budget and makes it more doable."

Wyze's intention was to record like Carr and Blackwell did, live in the studio with a minimum of retakes and no overdubbing. Easier said than done, as he discovered. "I play two harmonicas an octave apart in one of the songs which is hard to do with one mouth and in some cases we have a couple of guitar tracks so we had to [overdub] that kind of stuff. But also it's hard to go into a studio and do a perfect take. Modern artists aren't trained to do that. And the fact is we're just no Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell! But we tried to represent the music as best as we could."



Wyze describes what Indianapolis was like in Leroy and Scrapper's heyday: "They first got together in 1928, the Roaring Twenties, and things were on fire," he says. "The Great War was over and there were a lot of great-paying manufacturing jobs in modern factories. Indianapolis was a very modern, successful, upbeat town that had people who had disposable income and Indiana Avenue downtown, where Leroy and Scrapper first met, was a very lively place for the black community. There were record shops and many, many clubs and it had the Walker Theater which opened in 1927, one of the most magnificent theatres of that time. In 'Naptown Blues' they sing, ***"When you get to Naptown/ The blues won't last very long"*** and they even sing about the Walker Theater: ***"I can get me a ticket/Stop by the Walker show …"*** So things were very, very good. But within a year or so of these guys first meeting, we got the Great Depression – [which] I think will give you a reason to write and sing blues songs!"

Carr's songs feature striking phrasemaking and a real poetic sensibility. "I admire his simplicity and his incredible ability to conceive of an idea and I admire all the stories that he and Scrapper told because they recorded two hundred or so sides during their very short career," says Wyze. "And it's said that 'How Long - How Long Blues' sold a million copies. It's astounding how popular they were. And astounding how forgotten they are."

Wyze has visited key sites in the Carr and Blackwell story, including the graveyards where they are buried, Carr having died in 1935, aged thirty, from alcoholism and Blackwell having been murdered during a mugging in 1962, aged fifty nine. "I spent forty five minutes walking up and down the rows of the cemetery where Scrapper is laid to rest. I had a friend with me and I said, 'Hey, bud, here he is!' I didn't say, 'There's the gravestone!' It was, 'Here he is!' Like he's alive. Well, he isn't alive but his music


Christopher Wyze

"I'm trying to put the spotlight back on their music. I feel like I know them…"

is still here, man. That's what's so cool."

Outside music, Wyze has had a high-flying career in marketing, having been CEO of a successful company, 5MetaCom. Only in his late forties, twenty or so years ago, did he start performing for the first time, in a blues covers band, and only a few years ago did he start writing original material. "I don't own the business any more but I still work a couple of days a week," he says. "I like the mental work of being an advertising guy so I still do that but I work the other five days on the music. I'm having the time of my life. I just can't wait to get up in the morning - I got up at five this morning so I could get working on some new songs I'm writing."

Wyze, as Chris Wirthwein, has also written four books: one on a historic Indianapolis golf course and three on marketing with titles like ***Different Rules: The B2B Marketer's Guidebook To Product Differentiation.*** (Don't all rush at once but they're available on Amazon and elsewhere.) He believes that this experience has helped his songwriting. "I spent forty-plus years learning how to make words go together. People don't pay you as a marketing guy to make up stuff that's boring and that people



don't want to read. Same with my books. And that's transferrable. So I'm lucky to have gotten to this age, past sixty, where I'm fully made as a writer and now I get to apply that to something new which is just thrilling.

"I almost killed myself being an advertising guy. Not that I didn't love what I did and I still do but it was hard and it burned me out and that's why music has been so special and such a joy. I got a little weary getting up at five to go to the office to work on the next campaign but I don't mind getting up at five to write a song! This is for love. And I get to make a record of Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell songs. That's a win!

"I used to be in a world of setting sales targets for everything. Now I set fun targets. And [targets for] enjoyment and pleasure and joy. And you know what? On all of those measures, the album is a success!"

Trevor Hodgett

christopherwyzeandthetellers.com

Naptown Blues: The Songs Of Leroy Carr And Scrapper Blackwell **is out now on Big Radio Records**




Gerry Murphy


"It's astounding how popular they were. And astounding how forgotten they are!"

John Boyle III and Christopher Wyze

