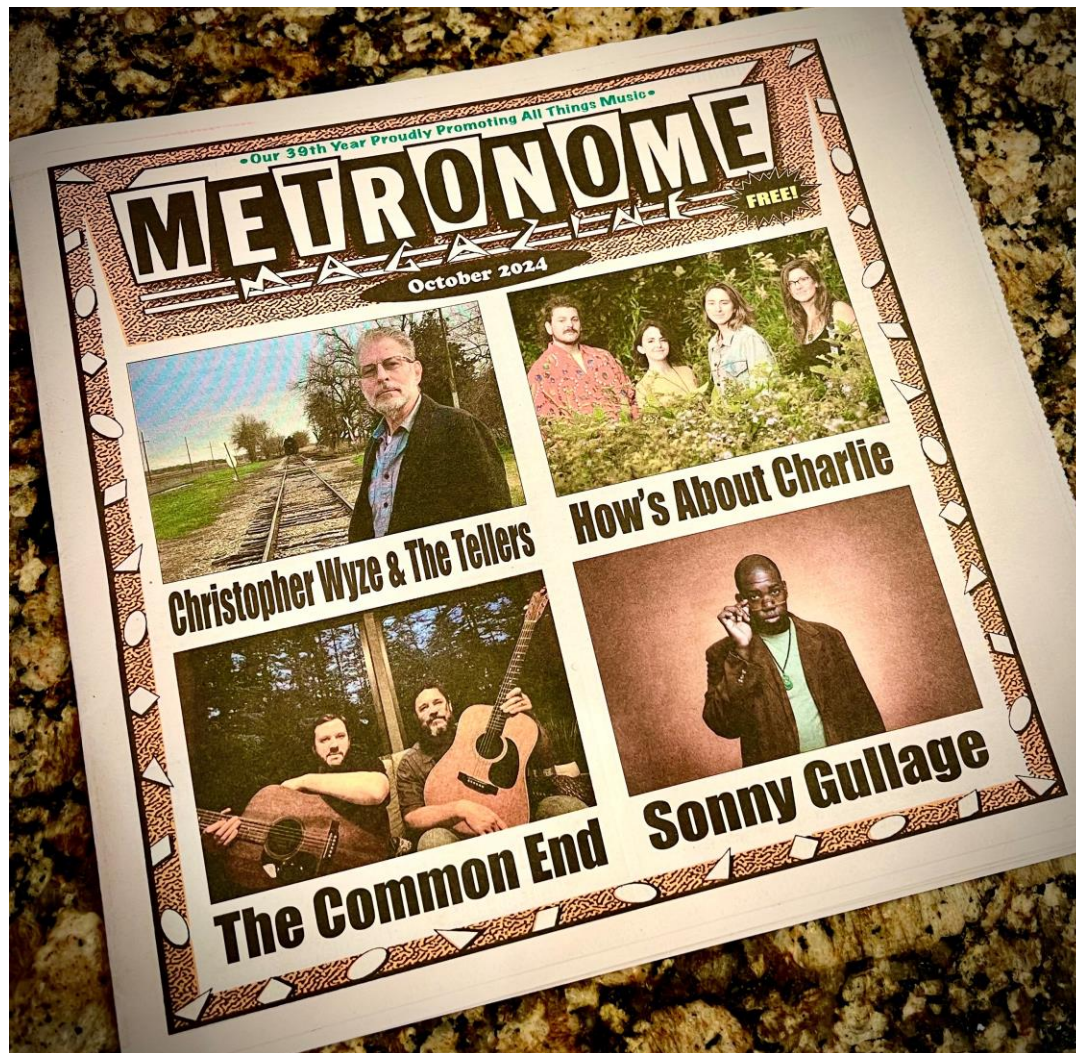


# Metronome – October 2024





# Christopher Wyze *and* The Tellers

With twenty years as a cover blues-band singer, Indiana's Christopher Wyze has become a clever lyricist and songwriter in his own right. His original songs blend sounds and experiences that have shaped him: Blues, Americana, Rock & Roll and country, and he melds them all with his distinctive voice and clever musical tales.

Wyze has been deeply influenced by his time spent in the Mississippi Delta and his new album, *Stuck In The Mud*, reflects those influences. Spending time in Clarksdale, Mississippi's, Shack Up Inn and recording at Ivy Manor at The Shoals in Sheffield, Alabama has afforded him a real deep look into the Blues.

I spoke with Chris one warm summer day in July and he outlined how *Stuck In The Mud* came together and was recorded and how it has transformed his life...

**METRONOME: How did you gain an appreciation for the Delta blues?**

Christopher Wyze: My brother came home from college and I'm still in high school. He brings home the double or maybe even the triple EP of Bobby Blue Bland and B.B. King live. When I heard that, I was just taken away.

I remember watching Joe Williams, the old lounge singer, on Johnny Carson one night when I was a kid. I thought, Oh my God. I was a singer, I sang in high school. I would just sing along, but it all started with that Bobby Blue Bland and B.B. King record.

**METRONOME: Were you in bands during High School?**

No. I was a choir guy. In my high school, that was the only thing we were worth a damn at - the music department. As a freshman, I was a first tenor, a second tenor as a sophomore, a baritone as a junior and a bass as a senior (laughs). We traveled all over the state, and I won a gold medal in the state competition.

When I went off to college, I really didn't do anything with music. This was the 1970s. We listened to a lot of music, and had a lot of enhancement to help our musical enjoyment as well. It was so cool. It was just great. Then I became a working stiff and forgot about it.

**METRONOME: What got you back into performing music?**

About 20 years ago I was at this church dinner. It was a wine dinner. There was a guy up on stage playing guitar. He was a very good guitar player. He took a break, and I went up to him and said, That was really cool. He said, "Thanks." Then he asked me, "Are you a musician?" I said, Well, I sing. He said, "Let me go grab a drink, and then come up on stage and we'll do a few songs."

I went up on stage with him and sang a few blue songs, I don't remember what they were, and it just kept going and going. People were hanging around. When we were done, I said, I'll see you later man. I didn't even know the guy.

He said "Dude, wait up, we need a front man

in our band." I said, What's a front man? He said, "Why don't you come over to my place next Wednesday and I'll have the guys over?"

I'm telling you, from that moment on it was like, Hey guys, let's do this. Let's put this band together. They asked, "What do you wanna do?" I said, Well, if it's gonna be a band, it's gonna be a Long John Baldry cover band.

They didn't even know who he was, but we ended up doing "Seventh Son," "Hambone" (which was an unbelievable, swampy delta blues song) and a couple of other Baldry tunes. We just started playing out. That was 20 years ago.

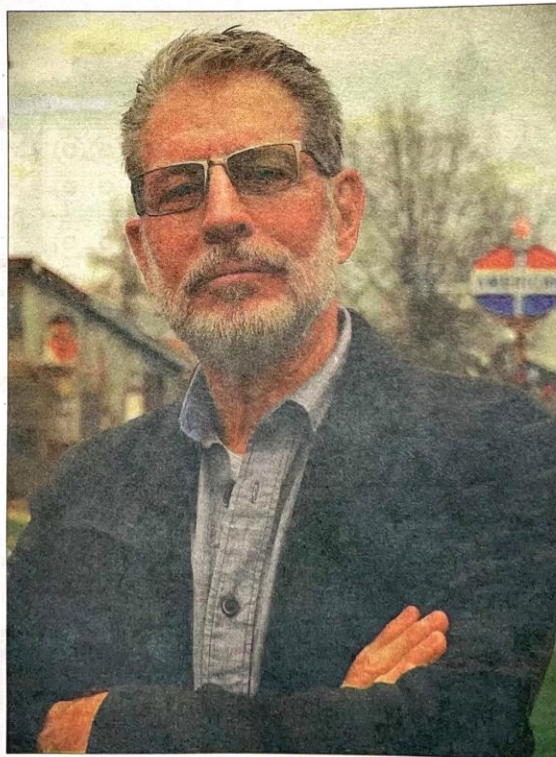
**METRONOME: So you joined the band?**

Yeah, I started playing with these guys. They're

really good musicians. One of them is on the record with me. He's been with me since day one when I showed up at the guy's basement. His name is Gerry Murphy. He's our bass player. He's like my muse that sits on my shoulder and says, "Man, you can do this."

So I'm playing with these guys and I thought, "We need a harmonica in this band, so I picked up a harmonica and a few instruction books and I learned to play the harmonica in the car. I carried harps in the car the whole time. Every minute I was driving, I was listening to instructional CDs. The dude who is the man of instructional blues, at least in my mind, was Jon Gindick.

**METRONOME: Did his lessons help?**



Yeah. I was into Gindick's stuff and I saw that he puts on this harmonica jam camp in Clarksdale, Mississippi. I got up the gumption to sign up for the camp.

I was an okay player when I showed up there, but then I fell in with the guys who were there. R.J. Mischo became kind of a muse for me on the harp and took me under his wing, but the guy that really did was Ralph Carter who was one of the guys that played in the Jam band.

**METRONOME: What did Ralph do for you?**

I got to know Ralph and he's like, "Man you're good. You can do this." We had a jam and I asked, Is it okay if I sing and then play a little harp? He said, "Yeah." So I sing and he pulls me aside and says, "Dude, you have to start writing some music." So I'm hanging with him, we're drinking beer and I learned his story.

He was from the East Coast, but as a kid he ended up in Eddie Money's band. He was writing songs with Eddie Money. He became his tour musical Director. Now he does guitar camps, songwriting camps, and harmonica camps in the Mississippi Delta.

**METRONOME: Did you go to his camps?**

Yes. I would go back to these camps and every time I would go back, Ralph and I would stay up all night, shoot the shit, drink beer and play music. Then he says, "You and I are going to do a record." I said, Okay, what songs you got? He said, "You're gonna write the songs." I said, What do you mean? I don't write music. He goes, "Well, you need to." So he goes back to Los Angeles and I go back to Indianapolis.

**METRONOME: Did you end up writing some tunes?**

I'm reading in the Wall Street Journal about this new recording studio in Muscle Shoals. It's called Ivy Manor at The Shoals. This guy buys this old mansion and re-does it. He says, "Hey bands, come here, stay for the week, we cook for you, you play music night and day and the whole place is yours. We run the studio."

So I take this cell phone shot of the article about Ivy Manor and I text it over to Ralph. I said, Hey man, this is where we're gonna make our record. I was just messing with him. He texts back and says, "Okay, when are we recording?" This was early December 2021.

So I start fooling around with some songs and he and I set a date. I go down and meet him in Clarksdale. I take my lyrics that I started on and we finished them all there. We came out with about a dozen tunes.

**METRONOME: Tell me about the songs on *Stuck In The Mud*.**

The first song on the album called "Three Hours From Memphis..." I was driving down to Memphis to pick up Ralph at the airport. We were going to go to Clarksdale, Mississippi, sit on a picnic table and finish the songs. I'm in my Ford Explorer and I'm looking at the GPS and thinking, Where the hell am I? I'm three hours from Memphis. Then, I said,

Holy shit, that's a song.

I instantly had the whole idea of the song in my head. I pretty much wrote all the lyrics to the entire song on the armrest of my car while I'm trying to keep it on the road. When I was done with it, I looked up and it said, one hour to Memphis. That was one of the first songs he and I worked on, and we made it into a Blues rocker. It was just magical.

**METRONOME: When did you record the album?**

We made the record in May 2022. We spent five days in Ivy Manor at Muscle Shoals. Ralph auditioned the session guys - Justin Holder on drums, Brad Kuhn on keyboards, my bass player Gerry Murphy, who came down with me, and Eric Deaton on guitar (Black Keys).

**METRONOME: It says you recorded some songs in The Juke Joint Chapel, and the Shack Up Inn in Clarksdale. How did that all work?**

I had a bunch of tunes with a bunch of session guys. I asked, What am I gonna do with them? I thought, I want a record label. So I joined a national songwriters association. I send them some songs and I get this "One To Watch" songwriter award from them. Then they had this mentor program, and I ended up talking to a guy named Jim Riley, who is a wonderful man. I sent him my songs, and he said, "Man, this is good stuff. You've got to put this out there on your own." I said, No, I want a record label. He said, "You don't want a record label," and he goes through all the reasons. I said, Yeah, but I do want a record label. So he says, "Talk to this guy."

It ended up being Johnny Phillips who is Sam Phillips nephew from Sun Studios. He's down in Memphis and runs Select-O-Hits with his brother.

I sent him my stuff, mentioned Jim Riley, and lo-and-behold, we put it together.

One of the things that helped me was Ralph saying, "Why don't you talk to Betsie Brown. She might be able to help you." She took me on as a project. She's worked on projects with Ralph.

So I get with Betsie and we start talking. There's a few songs on the record that I wouldn't say are Blues. I said to her, I have a few more songs. She said, "Why don't you record those and put them on the record?" That's what we did.

We went down to Clarksdale and we recorded in one day. That was in March of 2024. We did three songs: the title track, "Stuck In The Mud," "Hard Work Don't Pay" and then "Soul On The Road."

I called Ralph when he got back to Los Angeles and said, I really want to do this right. I want to make this into more of a Blues record. We took a couple songs off and had a couple of slots. I asked, Would you be willing to come back to Clarksdale? Let's get Cary, I'll bring Murph and he's a got a drummer that he knows in Memphis. So we showed up to record in a studio in Clarksdale, and the day I'm on my way down there, the guy calls Gary Vincent and says, "I have Covid. It's not like a cold. I'm sick. I'm down. You can't use the studio."

**METRONOME: Where did you record?**

We recorded at The Juke Joint Chapel there at The Shack Up Inn with some very rudimentary equipment. I rented the mics from Gary, and Ralph and our engineer, Levi Land, made that in to a recording studio. We recorded three songs. One of the songs, I wrote that morning. It's a song that me and Murph had played for years, but for a lot of reasons it needed different lyrics. Ralph said,

"Why don't you write new lyrics?" I woke up the next morning and wrote "Hard Work Don't Pay" and we recorded it that afternoon.

**METRONOME: Tell me about writing the song, "Soul On The Road." What is that song about?**

I went to a songwriter camp in September 2023. That's where I was introduced to Cary Hudson. I was sitting on the front porch of my shack at the Shack Up Inn. I saw a guy loading up his stuff and leaving. I thought, Who is that guy? Where is he going? All of a sudden, I conjured up the story and made him a truck driver. I just started writing the words. An hour later, I had the song done. That's when I asked, Hey Cary, will you help me put some music to this? It didn't take Cary and I more than 15 minutes to make it a song.

**METRONOME: "Money Spent Blues" was a great number. What inspired that?**

I guess I used a little bit of editorial license. I had written that song, or most of it a couple of years ago. I imagined this guy who is my perfect sucker. Any commercial he sees, he buys that product and he's constantly out of money. He's the guy every advertising guy dreams of.

**METRONOME: "Looking For My Baby" was a real upbeat tune. Did you write that about someone you know?**

I imagined this guy who is just a blowhard. He meets these guys in a bar and says, Hey fellas, I'm looking for my baby. But he's full of shit because he doesn't have a girl. He's a liar. In fact, when he says he's looking for my baby, what he means is, someday I'd like to have a chick. At the end of the song you find that out. He says, I searched both night and day, but there is no girl that got away.

I'm looking for my baby cause I never had a girl. Brad Guin came in and played the baritone sax on that one.

**METRONOME: I really liked the song "Someday." What was that about?**

Well, you know it's another loser guy. It's probably the brother of the guy who doesn't have a chick. I don't know, but this guy is also a blowhard. He just kept telling stories about all the stuff he was going to do. He's just full of shit. But I did it like a Bluesy, melancholy lounge singer song, like the dude was a stud, but he's actually a bonehead.

I really had fun with that one. My thing is these songs are all stories. It's not as hard as writing a book especially when I get an idea. The song just comes through. I don't remember laboring over any of these songs. It's kind of cool because in my work, as an advertising writer and a book writer, I labor. It's hard work.

**METRONOME: Did you take all the photographs in the booklet and on the CD jacket?**

Pictures of me. No. They were done by Coop Cooper. But all the sort of decorative photos, they're all mine.

**METRONOME: Who did the front cover graphic of you looking at the tractor stuck in the mud?**

That was done by a friend and a great, creative guy by the name of Koldo Barroso. I knew what a great illustrator he was. He's from Spain. My wife Sally shot 1300 photos of me to get that illustration on the cover. I sent the photos of myself and the tractor to Koldo. Koldo made me look super cool I think. He made the whole thing happen. He also did the artwork on the booklet as well.

-- Brian M. Owens