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BIG CITY *Rhythm &* BLUES

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from Mississippi
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Blues Singer/Songwriter Showcase

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Doug Macleod, Deshawn D'Vibes Alexander & Paul Thorn

BIG CITY VIEWS

"Damn Right I Got The Blues" - Buddy Guy

Singers & Songwriters Are Everywhere!

SONGWRITING TIPS:

"A song is only good if it can do good." —Pete Seeger

"I don't really want to write another song but don't tell that to my mind. It keeps throwing out words and I have to make them rhyme." —Willie Nelson

"The best ones (songs) are written very quickly. The longer it takes to finish the song the more difficulty it takes to pin it down and focus in on it and lose your original intentions." —Bob Dylan

"Whenever the various facts come to your mind that you think are interesting, it can do somebody good." Willie Dixon

When I began thinking about blues singers and songwriters, I will always remember when I first met the blues in Columbia, MO while attending Mizzou, I would go to the **Blues Note** where I saw some iconic blues legends - John Lee Hooker, Albert Collins, Willie Dixon, Koko Taylor and many others. Their songs are still so real to me today as they were then. Back when the Blue Note was on the Loop, I remember one of many nights drinking beer in the gravel parking lot with my friend **Luana B. Hays** who had moved from Chicago to go to Mizzou too. We were in some of the same classes, but we met at Booches, a pool hall, the night that Ronald Reagan got elected in 1980. She knew **Koko Taylor** and showed me her prized possession of an autographed photo of Koko with **Willie Dixon** but what was missing was Willie's autograph. So, Luana was determined to get Willie's autograph. We waited in the parking lot after everyone else was gone so we could see Willie Dixon



As Woody Guthrie would sing: "So long, it's been good to know you!" Shawn D'Vibes Alexander, Doug MacLeod and Paul Thorn, #41 Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise, 11/1/24

after the show for his autograph. Finally, his son helped and got it done. He said that Willie wasn't feeling so good and had to go back to his room and rest. The night that Willie Dixon performed was on May 3, 1983, just a few days after his friend **Muddy Waters** had died on April 30th. Willie had just called Muddy who sang him a verse of his

Willie Dixon and Koko Taylor



hit song that Willie wrote for him, "Hoochie Coochie Man," and that was the last time they spoke. Before Muddy passed, Willie had him sign letters to help him start his visionary **Blues Heaven Foundation** that was established in 1982 at Chicago's Chess Records. In 1989 I interviewed Willie Dixon during the **W.C. Handy Awards** now known at the **Blues Music Awards**. Willie Dixon often preached: "The blues are the true facts of life. Blues change as time changes. When you learn the blues you learn how to cope with the true facts of life. We'll take as our subject for tonight the shape the world is in. I'll go anywhere to promote the blues and keep it going until it's bigger and better. The blues are the roots, the rest are the fruits."

Luana introduced me to Koko Taylor in 1981 when she decided to throw a birthday party for Koko's husband Pops and for her and I after the show. Koko and Pops left early but Luana and I drove Koko's band, The Blues Machine, back to their hotel. We still were

Feb./March 2025, Vol. 31 No. 1

INSIDE

Blues Singer Songwriter Showcase

Doug MacLeod

A Life Well Traveled.....9

D'Vibes

Spreading the Musical Joy!!.....12

Paul Thorn

Life Is Just a Vapor.....14

Willie Dixon

Songwriter Extraordinaire, and the Man Who Was the Blues.....16

Jimmy Reed

Big Boss Man!.....18

Christopher Wyze

Driving Inspiration.....19

Bobby Rush

Blues Legend.....20

Charlie Musselwhite

The Life of a Blues Legend.....22

Thornetta Davis

Detroit's Queen of the Blues.....24

Larry McCray

Keeping the Blues Alive.....25

Luke Woltanski

Northern Michigan's Singer/Songwriter.....26

Elizabeth Landry

Pure Michigan Melody Maker.....27

Mike (Mojo) Griffin.....28

Hastings St Boogie

Greg Nagy

The Real You.....30

ON THE ROAD

Mississippi.....32

Minnesota.....39

New Orleans.....34

Atlanta.....36

New York City.....38

Chicago.....39

Wisconsin.....41

Cleveland.....41

Memphis.....43

Broadcast.....44

REVIEWS.....48

Blues Birthdays.....54

Junior's Art Page.....55

Imagine Sampler #36.....56

Subscribe.....58

Sugar Mae.....60

Festivals 2024-25.....62

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Christopher Wyze

Driving Inspiration

BY BOB MONTELEONE

Last year, Indianapolis-based singer/songwriter/harmonica player Christopher Wyze released his first full length CD, *Stuck in the Mud*, to wide acclaim. The song "Back to Clarksdale" hit #1 on the R&R Blues chart and his album hit #2 on the Blues Album chart. After a long and successful career in the advertising business, he decided a couple of years ago to put his writing skills he had developed in the ad business to use. Having fronted a blues cover band for 15 years, he had been attending blues camps in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and had fallen in love with the vibe and musical history of the Delta. Through these camps, Wyze met multi-instrumentalist/producer Ralph Carter, who was one of the camp's band leaders and was "the guy I met who really got me going on writing songs." Carter was once the musical director for Eddie Money's band, co-writing Money's hit "Shakin'" and wrote songs and

toured with Sugaray Rayford. Wyze and Carter became good friends through the years, and even though Wyze had not written any songs up until that point, one day Carter said, "We're gonna do a record some day" and Christopher replied, "I'd love to do your stuff." Carter goes, "No, we're gonna do your stuff." Here are some of Christopher's thoughts on writing the songs on *Stuck in the*

Mud: "All I do is look around the world around me for song ideas. And I see them, like, I can go a day or two and I might have 5 or 6 of them and I write them down, put them in my phone and I have hundreds of them. So, what I did was take my pile of lyrics to Clarksdale, Mississippi when we started for this record Ralph and I were gonna record in Muscle Shoals. And I said, 'Ralph, I've written these lyrics, uh, what do we do?' He said 'We'll make them into songs.' So, we sat out in the yard there at the Shack Up Inn at a picnic table for two and a half/three days and he would say, 'Tell me about this song.' 'Well, it's about this guy...' And he would say, 'Read me the words.' And, you know, I'm a front man in a band, so I'm reading it, I'm not even paying attention to how I'm reading it, but I think I'm delivering it as if it was a song."

Most of *Stuck in the Mud* was recorded at Ivy Manor at the Shoals with guitarist Eric Deaton, who plays with the Black Keys. Keyboardist Brad Kuhn and the rhythm section of bassist Gerry Murphy and drummer Justin Holder rounded out the studio group. Three more songs were recorded in Clarksdale at the Juke Joint Chapel in the Shack Up Inn to finish the album. The players on this session were guitarist Cary Hudson, bassist Gerry Murphy, drummer Douglas Banks and Eli Hannon on the Hammond organ.

So, Christopher Wyze has completed his album, but what happens next? "What happened is I had this record done and

then I'm like, 'What am I gonna do with the record?' Oh, a record label, and people are like, 'you're not gonna get a record label' and I'm like, 'Well, try me.' You know, I'm up for stuff, I mean, nobody said I would ever be able to write a song." Long story short, Wyze knocked on a few doors with little success until he went to Nashville and met Jim Riley, who listened to the album and turned Wyze on to Johnny Phillips, nephew of Sun Records founder Sam Phillips. "I sent the stuff to Johnny and 3 weeks later we signed a deal and put it on Big Radio Records."

Coming up later this year is a new album, Christopher Wyze & the Tellers Live in Clarksdale, along with a companion concert/documentary video DVD. "I've been coming to Clarksdale for a dozen years or more and I just love it as a musician and a blues lover. I said to mu video guy Cooper, 'Hey Coop, I'm gonna get in the car and I'm gonna wander around and you're gonna follow me and film it and we're gonna show people Clarksdale, Mississippi.'"

One last bit about the opening song on *Stuck in the Mud*. "I'm driving to Memphis and I'm in the middle of nowhere. And I'm looking down at my GPS and I'm going, 'Where in the hell am I?' And I look down and it's like, 3 hours from Memphis. I'm like 3 hours from Memphis? Shoot, that's a song! And almost instantly I have this idea of this guy, he's heading down to Memphis, he's gonna be a star. People said he can't make it but he's gonna make it. He's gonna go there, and he sings the blues. And I got a little note pad I always carry, and I put that on the console and I wrote the song as I was driving. I was too scared to pull off the road, I thought I'm gonna forget this. And the funny thing is, I had no conception of this. At the time I wrote that I did not have a record label in Memphis. I did not have a publicist in Memphis. I didn't have this record, it hadn't even started. In retrospect, that song that I wrote in advance, is exactly what happened. It's weird. It makes me think I'm compelled to do this."

