

CHRISTOPHER WYZE & THE TELLERS



A lot about the band and their new album: LIVE in CLARKSDALE

July 2024 – Fresh off recording sessions in Muscle Shoals and the Mississippi Delta, Christopher Wyze & the Tellers jolted onto the global blues scene with "Stuck in the Mud" – their 13-track debut album of all-originals.

And what a jolt it turned out to be:

- Streaming in 90 countries...
- Thousands of radio spins...
- 1700+ hours of YouTube and TV views for their music video: "Stuck in the Mud"...
- A "One to Watch" songwriter accolade for Wyze from Nashville's International Songwriter Association (NSAI)...
- Broadcast, print and online press acclaim from around the world – album reviews, cover stories, features, photo spreads, interviews and podcasts...
- Eight months (and counting) of blues album charting, globally (RMR, The Big Blues Chart), and in the U.S. (NACCR), UK (Independent Blues Broadcasters Assoc.), Italy, Australia (Blues & Roots Airplay Chart) and France, Quebec, Belgium (Collectif des Radios Blues)...

- And radio-play charting for nine of the album's song...including a #1 chart position for "Back to Clarksdale" – Root Music Report (RMR) Blues Song, July 2024

And that was just the start...

January 2025 saw the newcomers score again – a coveted RMR top 40 Blues Album of the Year. And with that prize, Christopher Wyze & the Tellers became one of just three debut artists, along with Sonny Gullage and Jovin Webb, to crack RMR's Top 40 – out of the top 200 albums they ranked for 2024. Surprising? Uhhh...yes. But wait a minute...

Those "in the know" cited an even more mind-blowing fact about the surprising popularity of this gatecrashing, new-to-the-global-blues-scene band. Christopher Wyze & the Tellers had yet to play a single live gig. Not one.

Say what?!

True. The band had been formed as a studio project, the 2022 brainchild of singer-songwriter Christopher Wyze and producer Ralph Carter – musicians who had met 10 years earlier in Clarksdale at a blues gathering.

For years, the front man in blues cover bands, Wyze had yet to try his hand at writing songs. Oh, he had sung and performed on stage from a young age, even snagged a gold medal for *a cappella* singing in state-wide competition in Indiana. He sang. He performed.

As for multi-instrumentalist, performer, songwriter, composer and producer Ralph Carter, his musical chops blanketed the entire spectrum. In the rock world, he hit the ground running and rose quickly. Ralph became co-writer, bass player and Tour Music Director for double-platinum recording artist Eddie Money. Later, he earned writing and producing credits with NBC, Showtime and multiple LA recording artists. More recently Carter made his mark in the blues world as co-writer, producer and bass-playing performer with 2020 B.B. King Entertainer of the Year, Grammy-nominated bluesman Sugaray Rayford. Back to the story.

Shortly after they met, Carter urged Wyze, "You need to start writing. We're making an album of your songs, our songs, someday."

Contemplating the absurdity of Carter's crystal-balling, Wyze let things simmer. For a year. OK, maybe several years. That is, until Wyze, out of the blue, fired off this text to Carter in late 2021: "OK. Let's make the album." Wyze says now that he assumed his pal Carter would view it as a joke. He did not. Ralph immediately replied. He agreed to the proposition. As they say, "A job begun is half-done!"

But one notable hitch remained, a potential kill shot. In Wyze's five-plus decades on planet Earth, he had yet to write even one complete song lyric. Not that he hadn't given songwriting some thought. He had. In fact, from the moment Carter implored him to write songs, Wyze began conjuring and collecting blues song ideas – song titles, mostly, and story

concepts – on cash register receipts, paper scraps, fast food wrappers, and in auto-type misspelled iPhone notes. Full lyrics? Maybe a few. OK, hardly any. More like none, to be exact. But ahhh...the blues story ideas...

Despite all apparent hurdles, optimism reigned between the Wyze and Carter. So much so that the two hatched a plan for breathing life into the imagined album. They plotted out a team pow wow – a three-day, song-making shindig for the two of them, four months hence. In Clarksdale, Mississippi. Oh, and they booked a week of studio recording. In Muscle Shoals. What the hell were they thinking?!

Still plan-hatching, Wyze promised that in the ensuing weeks, he would fashion his idea-scraps into lyrics. He'd write a bunch of them, he assured Ralph. And he'd do it fast. Wyze committed to bring a dozen or so lyric sets with him. And to pick up the California-based Carter at the Memphis airport. Together, they would pilgrim on down to Clarksdale. Carter? He ante'd up a pledge of his own. He would lead the confab. "Bring your lyrics," he told Wyze. "We can...*and we will* ...make them into songs for the album."

Game on.

"A dozen, couple-hundred-word lyrics...how hard could that be?" Wyze remembers thinking. After all, that self-assurance, call it hubris, perhaps, had been fairly and squarely earned. For the previous 30 years Wyze had been a writer. Yes, people paid him to write – as a newspaper reporter, magazine writer, author (five books) and as the thinker and creator of advertising copy. Add it all up and his writings total roughly 1.2 million words (give or take). Let's face it, the guy had cranked plenty of words, stories of all manner, length and form. "Songs? Piece of cake."

Yet, in the rapidly vanishing days leading up to the already-booked week of recording in Muscle Shoals, Mr. Confidence discovered just how frustrating, thorny and exhausting – but not impossible – lyric writing could be.

And then, just four months later, as scheduled, the pair met for their Clarksdale music-making marathon. They would start with Wyze's lyrics and peen them into the songs for a band and an album that did not exist. And depending on how you sized up the boy's chances, it would not be crazy to suggest that a miracle of sorts occurred.

That's because, just as Carter had suspected, everything clicked.

Sitting at a picnic table on the grounds of the Shack Up Inn – Wyze, lyric sheets in hand, and Carter, guitar-armed – the two did exactly what they set out to do. In the Hollywood version of "Stuck in the Mud" – the likely never-to-be-filmed movie – the scene went down out something like this:

Carter: *“What’s this song about? Tell me about the guy in this story. Read me the lyrics. Slowly. How does this sound? This? How does it feel? Sing it. Ohhh...too many verses.”*

Wyze: *“Wait; I’ll cut some stuff. It needs a bridge? OK, hell yes. Hold on; I’ll write it. What if we tried this? Oooh...that’s too high, man. Down a step? Two? An octave? Higher?”*

All-day sessions, involving copious amounts of laughter, plus occasional doses of Mexican food and cerveza, yielded a baker’s dozen songs for the album.

Giddy, but slightly paranoid that the whole adventure may have been a bizzarro dream, Wyze and Carter made rough, fragile, start and stop iPhone-recorded demos of each tune.

Heavy lifting: done. Left to do: a bunch...Such as...gin up a few more songs with three additional bada\$\$ co-writers. Round up studio musicians. Record songs in Muscle Shoals and Clarksdale. Mix and master. Come up with a band name. Sign a label deal. Make a website for the band. Do some other stuff. And then, a whole bunch more other stuff. Six months later, all the sense and nonsense they needed to get done – they friggin’ got it done.

In some sort of weird, lucky, mystical and inexplicable way, just about everything played out according to the dream. And at a level hardly anyone (except maybe Ralph Carter...way down deep in his soul) had ever expected.

And it just may have turned out to be the music world’s feel-good story of the year. Because, for once, the “heard it a million times” whimsy of two musicians saying “Let’s make an album...it’ll be a hit” actually turned into... *a hit!*

Yet, in all the excitement...all the momentary, fleeting and repeated basking, one solitary, pointed, white-hot-burning question arose:

"What next?"

Again, and together, they came to the exact same answer (as paraphrased from the likely never-to-be-filmed movie):

Wyze and Carter: *“We’ll go back to Clarksdale. Bring the band. Play a show. Record it. **Make another album – a live album.** And while we’re at it, we’ll film the whole danged thing! When we’re done, we’ll drink beer in the Juke Joint Chapel. Maybe several.”*

And they did.

With LIVE in CLARKSDALE, Christopher Wyze & the Tellers give fans around the world who have devoured their studio work a first look and listen to the band...LIVE.

It all happened on October 1, 2024, at the Juke Joint Chapel – in front of a live audience. Wyze and the five-piece Tellers put on their show – right there on the surprisingly

grand stage. History tells us the now cozy Juke Joint Chapel had been cranking out heavy sounds in the area for decades, albeit of a wholly different sort. We're talking the incessant whirring and whizzing known to folks back then as the familiar, sweet and bitter strains of cotton ginning.

Today speaks a different story for the Chapel, now a lobby, bar and mighty-fine music room, just oozing with the blues. Oh, it still stands on the grounds of yesteryear's Hopson plantation. But now, it's the Shack Up Inn, thank you very much. You can stay there, have a beverage, and listen to first-rate blues right inside that old cotton gin, right in the heart of the Mississippi Delta.

Scores of beloved blues acts have clambered up onto that stage and let it all hang out: from Charlie Musselwhite, Kingfish and John Mayall to Cedric Burnside, North Mississippi All Stars...and now, Christopher Wyze & the Tellers.

LIVE in CLARKSDALE, the soundtrack and video show, features eight of the band's original radio-charting "Stuck in the Mud" album studio singles, including their RMR #1 hit "Back to Clarksdale". Plus, it features two all-time blues standards from the 1920s: "How Long, How Long Blues" and "Nobody Knows you When You're Down and Out" – made famous by early blues recording stars Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell.

Since then, these two gems have been covered by a "who's-who" of blues royalty: Lead Belly, BB King, Eric Clapton (both songs), Bessie Smith, Sam Cooke, The Spencer Davis Group with Steve Winwood, Tedeschi Trucks Band ("Nobody Knows You...") and Blind Lemon Jefferson, Ray Charles, T-Bone Walker, John Lee Hooker ("How Long...").

Blues-o-philes may know that Carr and Blackwell originally recorded both songs for Vocalion, on "portable" (for the time) recording equipment, inside a cramped hotel room in their hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. The same city in which a re-discovered 56-year-old Blackwell recorded his "Live at 1444 Gallery" album in 1959, just three years before his tragic, untimely death.

Wyze and the Tellers give two of Carr and Blackwell's best recordings a re-birth. It's their tribute to the mostly forgotten duo and to the rich blues heritage of their hometown: Indianapolis – also home to Christopher Wyze and two of the *LIVE in CLARKSDALE* Tellers: John Boyle and Gerry Murphy.

Along with the soundtrack and live show video, the combo CD+DVD set features a 50-minute "all things Clarksdale" documentary filmed in the Delta and hosted and produced by Christopher Wyze.

The bonus content film, *WYZE in CLARKSDALE*, takes viewers on a journey through musically historic Clarksdale and surrounds. Featuring the cinematography of award-winning Clarksdale film maker Coop Cooper, it includes a look at the fabled Crossroads, where Robert Johnson allegedly sold his soul to the devil. It takes viewers for a visit to the

historic train depot platform in nearby Tutwiler, where W.C. Handy first discovered the blues in 1903. Wyze and Cooper pay a visit (and their respects) graveside at the nearby resting place of blues harp legend Sonny Boy Williamson II. A walking tour through downtown Clarksdale. Stops along the way, including interviews with three of Clarksdale's most colorful characters completes the cinematic pilgrimage. Those hankering for a trip to the Delta get an insider's look into what's been called "the bluesiest place in the world. And *WYZE in CLARKSDALE* promises a high-roller VIP ticket behind the scenes.

The highly anticipated soundtrack and video set arrives via worldwide digital and physical distribution by Memphis-based Select-O-Hits on their Big Radio Records label. Music historians will recognize Select-O-Hits as the 1960 creation of Sun Studios impresario Sam Phillips and his brother. And music lovers will appreciate knowing the company remains owned and operated to this day by the Phillips family. *LIVE in CLARKSDALE* CD+DVD combo sets are available direct from the artist at www.bigradiorecords.com. The soundtrack is available on all popular streaming platforms worldwide, with video appearing on YouTube.

Meet the *LIVE in CLARKSDALE* band...



Christopher Wyze (CW) **Lead Vocals, Harmonica, Songwriter**

Ad man, author, journalist and storytelling writer for 40+ years. Band guy for 20. Grew up singing on stage, through his teen years. Stepped away from music in 1979, returning 25+ years later. Became frontman in blues/rock cover band with fellow Teller Gerry Murphy in 2007. Picked up harmonica, which led to him to Clarksdale, Miss. and chance encounter with future co-writer and the band's producer Ralph Carter in 2012. Began writing song lyrics in early 2022 at Carter's urging.

Recorded 12 of his co-written originals with session players in Muscle Shoals a few months later. By end of year was named a "One to Watch" songwriter by Nashville Songwriters Association International. Writes all copy for the band's website and blog. Doesn't let Tellers review drafts prior to publication (lame writer joke).

Lives in: Indianapolis, Indiana. **Hangs out:** on his tractor, mowing the pasture - and on the road, harmonica in hand.



Ralph Carter (the Delta Dog Whistle)

Musical Director, Producer, Songwriter, Percussion, Vocals

Multi-instrument musician, composer, producer, songwriter and performer. Reached prominence early in his career with double-platinum recording artist Eddie Money, as tour Musical Director, bass player and song co-writer. Made his mark in the blues world as co-writer, producer and bass-playing performer with 2020 B.B. King Entertainer of the Year, Grammy-nominated bluesman Sugaray Rayford. Co-wrote six of the *LIVE in CLARKSDALE* songs with Chris Wyze, and eight songs on the band's 2024 debut album *Stuck in the Mud*. Produced both albums. Coaxed Wyze into trying his hand at writing song lyrics in 2022. When you buy him one, make it a [*Timberbeast*](#).

Lives in: Ventura, California. **Hangs out:** Where else? Clarksdale, Miss.



Gerry Murphy (Murph)
Electric Bass, Vocals, Songwriter

Long-time bass-playing band mate, mentor and musical "fountain of knowledge" for C. Wyze since 2006. Co-wrote two *LIVE in CLARKSDALE* songs with CW, including the July 2024 Roots Music Report #1 blues song *Back to Clarksdale*. Accomplished guitarist, vocalist and background singer, Murph went all-in on 4, 5, 6-string, upright, acoustic and electric bass 20 years ago. Associate producer for *WYZE in CLARKSDALE* film documentary. Often shoots still photography for the band. Loves animals, road trips and playing without shoes on stage.

Lives in: Indianapolis, Indiana. **Hangs out:** in that bar stool over there, between CW and JB.



John Boyle (JB)
Guitars

Known for his intricate guitar work and a "hell yes I'm havin'-fun" stage mojo. Also plays bass, mandolin, sitar, drums, piano and harmonica. Performs across the country as a solo singer-songwriter, playing stages in Nashville, Chicago, New York, and Austin. Opened for bluesman Jimmy Vaughan. Has released three albums of his original music: *Early Lights* in 2018, *Prelude* in 2020, and *Somewhere In Between* in 2023. JB's new work, *Soul Driven*, reaches further into his blues and rock roots. Christopher Wyze and JB began performing and recording together in 2016. Has perfected the, "sounds just like a jet airplane taking off" guitar slide. Duck!

Lives in: Indianapolis, Indiana. **Hangs out:** in cool music venues just about anywhere.



Douglas Banks

Drums

Has played with scores of well known blues artists such as Ronnie Earl, Duke Robillard, Kid Bangham (Fabulous Thunderbirds), Shirley King (BB King's Daughter), Jerry Portnoy (Muddy Waters and Eric Clapton bands) Monster Mike Welch, Kenny Neal, Charlie Musselwhite, John Nemeth and Gene Taylor (Fabulous Thunderbirds) to name a few. Originally from the UK. Studied at University of Oxford. Tours and plays regularly in the U.S. and UK. A ballroom dance virtuoso performer and instructor. Rim shot!

Lives in: Memphis, Tenn. **Hangs out:** on the throne, behind a kick drum, either side of the pond.



Mark Yacovone
Keyboards

Piano, Hammond B-3, and accordion player originally from Providence, RI. Has played with musical greats Mojo Nixon, Jody Williams (Howlin' Wolf, Bo Diddley), Buddy Cage (New Riders of the Purple Sage), Maria Muldaur, Jeff Daniels, Kenny Brown, Bill Payne (Little Feat), Shannon McNally, blues legend Charlie Musselwhite, and Jack Sonni (Dire Straits). Was board member and house band keyboard and accordion player for Mississippi's Thacker Mountain Radio Hour. Least known for his brief television appearance in the reality series "Gene Simmons: Family Jewels."

Lives in: Oxford, Miss. **Hangs out:** in that smooth, silky, "sweep away your troubles" groove known as the blues.



Irene Smits
Background Vocals, *Stuck in the Mud*

Lead singer in Piedmont Blues band Goodnight Irene. Performs and records with guitarist and husband Tom Smits. Makes frequent 4,613 mile sojourns from her European home to the home of the blues, Clarksdale. Chanced upon Chris Wyze September 27, 2019 on the back porch of the Shack Up Inn in Clarksdale. After brief pleasantries, she, with husband Tom on guitar and Wyze on harmonica, launched into an impromptu jam of old time blues. Fun! Stumbled into Wyze again on September 30, 2024, once again in Clarksdale. With *LIVE in CLARKSDALE* session being held the next day, Wyze coaxed Irene into joining the band for *Stuck in the Mud* vocals. Super fun!

Lives in: The Hague, Netherlands. **Hangs out:** in the Mississippi Delta, home of the blues.