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THE LOW DOWN

By Kyle Christen

"Live In Clarksdale" Christopher Wyze & The Tellers

I received the new one from Christopher Wyze & the Tellers titled "Live n Clarksdale" and got real scared. I thought for sure the cops were watching. It borders on criminal for me to be objective here. My music collection contains as many "live" recordings as regular studio issues. I love the "Live" stuff. About a year ago, I reviewed this band's first CD "Stuck in the Mud," and am thrilled to be quoted on their website. At the time, I wrote, *"Every now and then, a new artist comes along with their first album that just blows you away."* But this new one? I can't hang on much longer! Christopher and his band have out-done themselves. Recorded at the Juke Juke Joint Chapel/Shack Up Inn. That spells b-l-u-e-s from Clarksdale, MS. And a DVD to boot! Ralph Carter is back in the producer's chair, plus adds percussion. and backing vocals, as well as co-writing 4 of the 8 originals with Christopher.

Those 8 tunes off the first disc are performed here, along with a couple of gems unearthed for this recording. The opener is "Three Hours from Memphis," which is kinda-sorta autobiographical and a good song. My new favorite this time around is "Money Spent Blues," which features solos from guitarist John Boyle and Mark Yacovone on keys. Right off the bat, you know this is the real-deal. "Hard Work



Don't Pay," just kicks ass with a heavy bass from Gerry Murphy and JB's slide work. "Stuck in the Mud" is a beauty, with Irene Smits adding backing vocals. "Cotton Ain't King" is quite geographical, but its words are so true. This band, including Dougals Banks on drums doesn't stop on "Looking for my Baby," which is so tight, I about asked for a knife. Christopher's tale of younger years growing up in the Hoosier state is "Good Friend Gone." *'Those teenage blues, they drove us crazy, we didn't do the things we should. Didn't do the things we supposed to, but we sure did the things we could. There's a moral to my story, there's a lesson, to my tale. You get a choice 'tween death and prison, you damn sure better choose that jail'*. Obviously, a lesson to be learned. A sad tale but great music.

True to his roots, Christopher pulled out two from way back, both from Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell. A couple of true bluesmen who actually lived in Indianapolis and like so many others, should have been given much more due than they've ever received. "How Long, How Long Blues," and "Nobody Loves You When You're Down And Out." Both of these have been covered by several blues artists over the years. To quote Christopher "Indianapolis is home to me and two of the Tellers. It just felt right to record two of Leroy and Scrapper's best. I got a little choked up on stage." No doubt, and you can hear and feel that connection, and the emotion in both songs from the whole band. Interesting ender, and maybe the prettiest version of "Nobody..." that you've ever heard. Just Christopher on vocals and Mark on piano. The nights' crew loved it, and the whole show for sure.

The DVD includes the identical performance to the CD, but an extra treat is a 50-minute exploration of Clarksdale with Christopher as your tour guide. I won't give it away, but he shows us around the Juke Joint Chapel and his room where he was staying at the Shack Up Inn. The bar, the stage, the décor, it's all there. Christopher takes a trip out to the grave of Sonny Boy Williamson II, who passed in 1965. The very small cemetery is a few miles south of town, near Tutwiler, MS. The remoteness, the scraggly trees, just being alone out there will give you the shivers. Another stop was at Deak's Mississippi Saxophone and Blues Emporium for a visit with the one and only Deak Haip! There's several other stops in Clarksdale, but I'll leave those for you.

Back to the music, Christopher Wyze & The Tellers have again pulled off a tremendous disc. It's as real as you can possibly get. The original songs are quality writes; the musicianship is first class, and the sound is great. Just what I expected from them. The package also comes with a nice 11-page booklet. To quote Johnny Phillips, owner of Select-O-Hits/Big Radio Records (and the nephew of Sam Phillips of Sun Records) *"I say to everybody who loves the blues, check out this all new album and video."* Yes, Johnny, exactly right!