

# Crystal Shawanda channels spirit and strength of blues pioneers on new True North Records album, *Church House Blues*, available April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020

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Toronto, ON, March 23, 2020 – For her second album on True North Records, Nashville-based singer Crystal Shawanda has channeled the spirit and strength of blues greats such as Etta James and Koko Taylor, paired with a contemporary delivery that makes the 10 tracks on ***Church House Blues*** a rousing testament to her powerful vocal and songwriting abilities.

Recorded at several Nashville area studios, Crystal Shawanda says that the recording sessions



for ***Church House Blues*** allowed her to e xpress herself without feeling like anyone was looking over her shoulder. “This is the most I’ve ever loved an album out of everything I’ve ever done,” she offers. “This is really who I am. It’s my most definitive album yet. All these songs reflect different aspects of who I am. It’s putting a finger on that definitively. I’m not trying to prove anything. I’m just being me. I’m done with trying to fit in.”

For the recording sessions, a sympathetic cast of all-star musicians was assembled, including session superstar Dave Roe on bass (Johnny Cash, Yola, Ceelo Green), the McCrary Sisters on backing vocals, Dana Robbins of Delbert McClinton’s band on sax, and Peter Keys of Lynyrd Skynyrd on keyboards. Produced by her husband, collaborator and co-writer Dewayne Strobel, it not only marks her fourth blues effort to date, but one of her most demonstrative as well. That’s evident at the outset, from the fiery delivery of the title track, the riveting drive of “New Orleans Is Sinking,” and the assertive strains of “Rather Be Alone,” to the quiet, contemplative desire and despair that scorches “Evil Memory,” the radio-ready hooks illuminated in “Hey Love,” and the emotive strains instilled in the bittersweet ballads “When It Comes To Love” and “Bigger Than the Blues.” At the center of it all are Crystal’s evocative vocals, a powerful,

provocative force of nature that elevates each encounter and sends the album's entries soaring towards the stratosphere.

An indigenous musician who grew up on the Wikwemikong reserve on an island in Ontario, Canada, Crystal lived in a home filled with the music her oldest brother loved most: the blues – even though her parents encouraged her to play country songs. Moving to Nashville brought her some early success in country music, but as Crystal herself admitted in an interview, “The whole time I was singing Patsy Cline on stage, I was singing Etta James at home.”

Originally signed as a country artist to RCA Records in 2007, she produced a Top 20 hit on country radio, sold over 50,000 copies in the US, and reached Top 20 on the **Billboard** Country Album Chart; but the pull of the blues music she heard in her heart and soul was too strong to ignore. Eventually, she left RCA, formed her own label and began making the blues music that is her true calling.

It's that free spirited approach that's found her becoming a critical favorite. Her first album for True North Records, **VooDoo Woman** (2018) elevated her to the upper strata of today's most expressive and exhilarating performers. Although influenced by such iconic individuals as Etta James, Koko Taylor and the Staple Singers, she claims a specific signature style all her own.

Still, Crystal is hardly what one might call an overnight sensation. “I grew up with blues music and I used to jam with blues musicians when I was still living in Canada,” she recalls. “It's funny. After moving to Nashville the second time in 2000, I was discovered while actually playing the blues —the music made by Muddy Waters, B.B. King, Big Mama Thornton. But when I was offered the record deal to make country music, it felt like the opportunity of a lifetime, and so I took it and ran.”

After scoring initial success as a country artist, she garnered a legion of devotees, marquee status as a major headliner, and even became the subject of a reality show, “Crystal: Living the Dream,” on the CMT television network.

She followed her stint at RCA with an independent effort **Just Like You**, garnering Canada's prestigious Juno Award in the process. She also had the distinction of performing at President Barack Obama's inauguration festivities in 2013. She's since made her name as a motivational speaker and currently serves as board member of the not-for-profit Nike 7 charitable foundation.

“I veered towards the blues because that's the music I love to sing,” Crystal says in retrospect. “It feels so natural, the kind of music I was meant to sing. It's a beautiful release. It's like letting a bird out of a cage. This is what I'm supposed to do. This is how I fly.”

## **Church House Blues Track Listing:**

- 1. Church House Blues**
- 2. Evil Memory**
- 3. Move Me**
- 4. Rather Be Alone**
- 5. When It Comes to Love**
- 6. Hey Love**
- 7. Blame It on the Sugar**
- 8. Bigger Than the Blues**
- 9. I Can't Take It**
- 10. New Orleans Is Sinking**

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