

Watermelon Slim
Escape From the Chicken Coop
NorthernBlues
Run Time: 46:39

Some artists in today's crop have a hard time being pigeonholed by critics, music stores, and record labels. Don't you hate it when you go to a certain aisle of a music store and find an artist or an album by artist that shouldn't be there? I imagine that Watermelon Slim is going to have a lot of those kinds of folks scratching their heads when they get ready to put /Escape From the Chicken Coop /out on their store shelves or go to write a review for their magazine. Luckily, here at JJS we recognize that good American music is simply that. Blues fans, Blues-Rock fans, classic country, jazz, swing, rockabilly, and southern rock can all be heard in a juke joint! Remember all the classic blues artists played variety at house parties, juke joints, and barns to keep the alcohol flowing and the people dancing. Genres and pigeonholed artistry is a method of modern invention, though sometimes it does serve its purpose. Slim's music either in blues or now in country has always managed to blur those lines. Slim knows that country and blues have a close kinship. Back in the early days of recording, the marketing between blues and country sadly boiled down to race relations. Hank Williams, Sr. learned guitar from an African-American blues player in Birmingham, Alabama named Tee-Tot. The godfather of modern country music Jimmy Rogers used African-American musicians in his backing band at the recording studios. Son House, Charley Patton, Tommy Johnson and a host of other blues players recorded in the same studios as many popular country artists in their time. In the Piedmont, blues and bluegrass from the area is hard to distinguish apart to the untrained ear.

With all that said, Watermelon Slim has recorded what some would call a traditional country album and has done it quite well. "Caterpillar Whine (Long Line Skinner)," "300 Miles," "Truck Drivin' Songs," and "18, 18 Wheeler" is just as fun as Dave Dudley's trucking anthem "Driving My Life Away" and rocks just as much with Slim's slide painting the picture. "You See Me Like I See You" is just like a classic Tammy Wynette & George Jones country duet. "Wreck On the Highway" is a slowed bluegrass blues gospel that will send chills up your spine with its conviction. "Should Have Done More," "The Way I Am," and "It's Never Too Hard To Be Humble" is country music's prototypical moralistic storytelling at its finest. Slim reads Moe Bandy's "Hank Williams You Wrote My Life" with more conviction and soul than the original. "America's Wives" makes it an almost perfect country album as it is a wonderful ode to backbone of the country, it's women.

With long-time Delbert McClinton collaborator on board for this highly productive session as both songwriting partner and guitar player, the album does lend itself to sounding like some of Delbert's more country roots work. The album does have a deeply modern feel with some of the souped-up Fender Telecaster work lending itself to modern country/southern rock sounds that Elvin Bishop, Charlie Daniels, and a host of others have perfected over the years.

It's hard to tell where Slim's comfort zone is - blues or country. It's a good thing because artists should just be comfortable with themselves. Slim's passion lies in the fact of making good music that is both relevant to himself and to anyone who might be listening. Blues fans might be turned away from the twang that paints a wide swath across the album. It's definitely country. However, true blue blood Watermelon Slim fans will find Slim's passion irresistible. It's a strong step in a different direction that can sometimes kill an artist's following. However, Slim's never been one to play by the rules. He does his things his own way like many of his own musical heroes. Something tells me that somewhere in the country, Watermelon Slim is becoming a musical hero to another artist out there refusing to play by the music industry's rules and just make damn good music. Ride on, Slim!

Posted By Ben the Harpman to Juke Joint Soul