

**Watermelon Slim and The Workers**  
**Two Days of Blues Paradise**  
**April 26, 2007: The Thirsty Ear – Columbus, Ohio**  
**April 27, 2007: Gilly's – Dayton, Ohio**

**Thursday, April 26, 2007**  
**The Thirsty Ear – Columbus, Ohio**

Upon arrival to the Thirsty Ear with my drunken friend Bubba South, there were two things that immediately stood out. First, there was a buzz in the air and this was before Bubba's beer soaked breath offended anyone. The place was packed. This crowd was excited to see Watermelon Slim and The Workers. Second, the presence and support of The Columbus Blues Alliance was very obvious. This group knows talent and according to The Workers bass player, Cliff Belcher, "these guys know how to take care of musicians and know how to throw a party". This organization did a great job organizing and promoting Watermelon Slim and The Workers. According to the band, this blues society is one of the top ones in the nation. I was so impressed that I joined and I am happy to now call myself a member.

All this made for one great evening.

Before the show started, Bubba and I took our CD's up to the band, for autographs. Yes, we are still autograph geeks. We were reassured by Slim that our geekdom was OK as he told us that "he grew up in a minor league baseball town and it was a big deal for him to get autographs". What was really cool was that as soon as we were done, I turned around and quickly realized that Bubba and I had broken the seal. There was now a line formed for others to meet Slim and the band. Let me state right now that these guys are some of the nicest people that a music fan could ever meet. Each member took the time to thank us for their support and let me tell you, it was genuine.

The show started around 9:30PM. Bubba had already emptied a twelve pack of Coors Light (on top of the three or ten he had before we hooked up). The band opened with a Muddy Watersesq "I'm a King Bee". This set the tone for night as we get to hear Slim honor the past (several times) and celebrate his current status as a very hot blues act and future legend.

Next came Slim's hit "Hard Times". Watermelon Slim's entry for the Blues Music Award's Song of the Year. It was at this very moment that I locked in on Cliff Belcher's bass playing abilities. It has always been my opinion that a bass player's job is to:

- #1. drive the band's tempo and make sure it does not falter
- #2. lay a solid foundation so that the melodic structure has a home.

Cliff achieves both without fail. Listen to this track or any other and I'm sure you will agree.

For what it's worth, these guys deserve any accolades they receive. Michael Newberry on drums (donning a really cool porkpie hat) provides a rock steady influence. As Slim stated during band introductions, "Michael Newberry is the real Captain of this ship".

Ronnie "Ronnie Mack" McMullen Jr, adds a great guitar fit to the band. He fits in very well with Slim's slide. At no point did I feel that the two were in each other's way. They really are a nice compliment to each other.

I sincerely hope they take all 6 awards on May 10, 2007.

Slim continued on with a nice mix of originals that included "Ashtray", "Devil's Cadillac", "Dumpster Blues" and "Juke Joint Woman" all from his CD *Watermelon Slim and The Workers*. My favorite part of the first set was his back-to-back Muddy Water's songs "I'm Ready" and "Mannish Boy". "Mannish Boy" has long been a favorite of mine. Slim treated this song with the respect it deserves and also gave the crowd a chance at some very appropriate audience participation. The crowd did not disappoint.

During intermission we all had a chance to interact with the band outside the club. The boys really seemed to be gleaming as a crowd of people followed them outside for a smoke. It was fun to stand back and watch as Slim entertained all that spoke to him.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> set started with one of Slim's famed "Truck Holler's" from his CD *Up Close and Personal*. This got everyone's attention. The place realized Slim was back for more. Slim and The Workers plowed through new material from the *Wheel Man* CD including the title track and "Black Water". My favorite part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> session was when we got to hear Slim talk about his friend and fellow blues legend George Mayweather. Slim then treated us to a great version of the George Mayweather's "Tomorrow Night". The beauty of an experience like this is when you get to hear a bluesman of the present honor a bluesman of the past. It takes you back in a way that cannot be described. No other genre of music presents this gift. The evening ended "They Call Me Watermelon Slim" from his *Big Shoes to Fill* CD with a great Herbie Hancock, *Watermelon Man* reference in the harmonica solo. For those of you who are not familiar with Slim's story, buy this CD or get to a show. This song tells it all.

By the end, it was clear that the band had accomplished its mission. They left the crowd exhausted, but wanting more. The band obliged by playing one more song. I forget which song it was as Bubba tends to be a bad influence on me. Simply said, this was the best blues concert I have ever been to. I hoped tomorrow night would be as good.

**Friday, April 27, 2007**  
**Gilly's – Dayton, Ohio**

I spent the better part of the day working off my well earned hangover and replaying the previous night's festivities in my head. Around noon, I got very excited as it stuck me that I get to do this wonderful thing all over again.

I had many questions running through my brain as I made the hour and a half trip west to Dayton. These questions (in no particular order) were:

1. How will the crowd be?
2. Where is Gilly's?
3. Can I drink as much as I did last night and not throw up?
4. Will Michael Newberry give me his porkpie hat?

I hooked up with my buddy Dayton Tick and we started in on question #3 right away. We hit Gilly's about an hour before the show started. Immediately after we sat down Ronnie and Cliff came over and both raved about the night before. Both said that the crowd and atmosphere were just amazing.

Soon after The Man himself, Watermelon Slim, came over and thanked me for coming out again and repeated Ronnie and Cliff's sentiments about the Thirsty Ear in Columbus, Ohio. Also, all three just raved about the Columbus Blues Alliance. Michael Newberry was nowhere to be found. No doubt, he heard that I wanted his hat and was hiding.

The show started at 9:30PM. It was obvious from the get-go that the crowd was not as big, nor as rowdy. Slim stated "small crowd, but a big party". I will say that while I was disappointed with the size of the crowd, those who did show were very appreciative and very loud. The band gave it's all. This was evidenced by the following conversation:

**Fellow Blues Fan:** "Did you see last night's show in Columbus?"

**Me:** "Yes"

**Fellow Blues Fan:** "Did they play the same set?"

**Me:** "Yes"

**Fellow Blues Fan:** "You would never know it as they sounded very fresh and energetic and I cannot believe they played the same set and nobody can do that and sound that good night after night and you gotta be bullshitting me! Right? and seriously, they played the same set? Wow, that is just amazing?" (at this point, I am doing a pee dance ala Forrest Gump when he visited the White House to visit President Kennedy and drank too much Dr. Pepper while trying to break away from this guy). "Are you sure they played the same set?"

**Me:** "Dude I gotta pee"

At intermission bassist Cliff Belcher noticed that my buddy, Dayton Tick was a Dallas Cowboy's fan (Tick had a shirt on). He proceeded to sit with us for the majority of intermission and talk about the impending NFL draft. Cliff is a great guy. Cliff, if you're reading this, Thanks for the great time.

Michael Newberry did not wear the hat on stage. Rumor has it, he locked in the van. I guess, I will be forced to buy my own.

If you like good music, support these guys. Buy a CD, go see a show. Check them out at [www.watermelonslim.com](http://www.watermelonslim.com).

I guarantee you.....you will not be disappointed. Oh yea, I drank as much as I did the night before and I didn't throw up either.