

**WATERMELON SLIM
& THE WORKERS**
The Wheel Man
NorthernBlues 0038



There's a seldom-stated truism in blues that if you're black, you can be as raw as Cedell Davis and it's called being honest. But if you're white, you'd better know how to do it *right* — you have to be the musical equivalent of a studied fine artist and make a conscious decision to rough it up despite having the chops to play clean.

Watermelon Slim, whose real name is Bill Homans, throws all that crap out the window.

At 58, Homans has already survived a heart attack and has officially declared himself “an old, scar-faced, half-toothless, ugly son of a bitch” who is going to play blues his way. He's neither clean nor accomplished in the classic definitions of the words, but put him together with bandleaders-turned-sidemen like Magic Slim on electric guitar and David Maxwell on acoustic piano, and he not only holds his own but defines a new genre — one that's the blues' answer to some of rock's greatest garage bands.

Homans has done it all and lived to sing about it, from being a burglar's “wheel man” to handling numerous jobs in the timbering industry. “Sawmill Holler” is an a cappella strut from an artist whose usually clear articulation is an amalgam of accents from the places he's lived: Boston, North Carolina, Oklahoma. Slim sings as if he has a razor blade stuck under his tongue and is concerned that his lyrics — cutting, indeed — might bleed him dry before he gets the words out of his mouth. His cover of “Got Love if You Want It” would make both Slim Harpo and the Stones proud, and it fits right in with originals such as “Peaches,” “Rattlesnake,” and the title cut, the latter of which includes what might be Magic Slim's finest solo ever set to record. It's to Homans' credit that a song like “Jimmy Bell” that showcases him just singing, playing harp, and pounding his feet is as powerful as his electric material.

DON WILCOCK