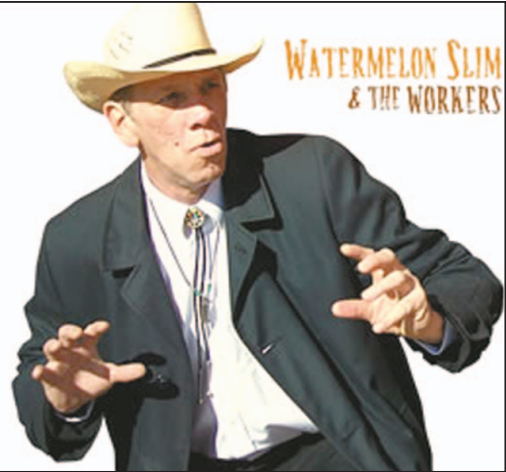


Featured Artist:
Watermelon Slim

Watermelon Slim, a.k.a. Bill Homans, is a blues man with lots to sing about. He taught himself to play guitar while serving in Vietnam. His résumé also includes watermelon farming and more than a decade of truck driving. His latest CD will be released April 17, but coast residents can hear some of his new music this Saturday when he makes his first appearance in south Mississippi at The Shed in Ocean Springs.

What does your blues name mean?
In 1979 and in '80 I started to farm and one thing I didn't lose money on was watermelons. And one day I had a 'D' harmonica in one hand and a piece of watermelon in the other hand and like a bolt out of the blue it hit me. It was

hot that day; 104 and 105 in the shade, and the heat probably got to me and it just hit me.



Watermelon Slim
What's it like to be touring the blues circuit these days?
I guess that's what I'm on. As you know I'm a former truck driver so miles is not something I'm unused to – a lot

of miles. Me and my accountant sat down a couple days ago and talked about standard mileage deduction and mine is more than my gross income. [Laughs] I see a lot of very good people out there both in the U.S. and internationally and there's lots of folks really looking for blues. One reviewer said the French are dying for some blues but people are having a hard time getting over there and exposing it well. There are untapped markets, but nobody knows whether the price of gas is going to shoot up to \$4 a gallon whether Mr. Bush invades Iran or whatever cockamamie thing he's going to do.

Where do you call home?
I'm in Oklahoma City.

You taught yourself to play in Vietnam. Where did you get the guitar?
It was at the old Vietnamese shop on the big base in Cameron Bay when I got ill and then I recovered and there was this little Vietnamese guy selling trinkets and short-timers sticks and doing embroidery. He had this cheap little balsa wood guitar and I paid \$5 for it and had a nice little conversation with him in French and I went back and started playing it with my Zippo lighter as a slide. First I played with a quarter and then I cut out a piece of a coffee can top for a pick.



Watermelon Slim & The Workers

You recorded a protest album while you were in the war. How did that go over?
No, no, no, no! Let's get this real straight I did not record any music in Vietnam, I recorded an album called Merry Airbrakes that I finished in 1973. It was not specifically a protest album, but it was an album that gave a vet's point of view. Also, it was the only music that has ever been recorded in the United States that attempted to expose the Vietnamese point of view about the war. I did so as gently as possible.

We weren't actually in Vietnam when it was recorded. That's a problem I have, a misunderstanding, and I know you'll help me correct it here. I recorded it in Massachusetts. It was in August of '72 and April or so of '73. I wasn't a service man, I was a veteran. I was the only veteran to record an album while the war was going on.

Can you tell me about the highs and lows in your career?
Off and on over the decades I often as much curse myself as thank myself for getting into music and pursuing it like I do. I've not always been sure I'm even good enough to do this and I'm not a dumb fellow and I know what professional standards are and in no way am I sure I've lived up to what professional standards had to be, which is almost technical and free of error. And I'm not a real technical guitar player. I'm not even a real technical harp player. You have guys like

Sugar Blue or Jason Popper. I'm a Big Walter throw-back if anything and I play the blues as technically precise as I can. I know 500 people that are better than me and I've taught a couple of them. [Laughs] I played or at least sat in with John Lee Hooker and Robert Cray and Henry "Sunflower"

Asheville, N.C. I grew up there and we had what was called a maid back in the segregation days and what she would sing around the house was, I learned much later, John Lee Hooker music – "One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer" and stuff like that and she was improvising on it. And I realized at least 10 or 12 years later what she was singing was blues. Rock groups go back as far but the blues came first. The rest of my life is validating something. It wasn't a choice.

As a songwriter do you ever find inspiration in depression or are you more motivated by a sunny day?

Sure. I find inspiration in depression readily enough. I can point you to the song "Shed My Blood in Mississippi" on the Big Shoes to Fill album, which is after I got mugged and robbed and left for dead in Mississippi after the first time I went there to play the blues and I was very depressed – in the throws of a bad marriage and trying to keep it together at the time. I got that song out of it.

You drop some big names in "Eau de Boue," saying you've conversed with Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, John Lee Hooker, and B.B. King, can you tell me more about that song and why it's in French?

That's basically because now that I'm recording for a Canadian label along with the fact that I do speak French. I learned it in school and I never stopped using it and I'm

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