

Talent oozing from Ouseburn

ALAN NICHOL casts his eyes and ears on the local roots music scene

IT LOOKS like Ouseburn is the place to be, with the Ouseburn Festival reaching its 12th year.

On Sunday night, The Cluny, at the Byker Bridge end of the burn, has a visit from arguably the hottest blues band of the moment when Watermelon Slim & the Workers set up shop.

Slim, the colourful leader of the outfit, is actually William P Homans who was born in Boston but raised in North Carolina. He has a biography of eyebrow-arching facts - including a stint as an Oklahoma watermelon farmer - which could not be invented.

He dropped out of college to enlist in the US forces and went to Vietnam.

Slim's first musical outing was back in 1973 with the album *Merry Airbrakes*, and he has worked alongside any number of bluesmen over the years. His links with former Canned Heat man Henry Vestine were particularly strong but he would often drop back into truck-driving in order to put food on the table.

He had a heart attack in 2002 and that life-threatening event seemed to galvanise him musically. Since then, he has released four albums of real note and last year, he won six Blues Music Awards categories.

He also won Mojo magazine's blues album of the year.

Albums *Ripe For Picking* (2005), *Watermelon Slim & the Workers* (2006) and *Wheel Man* (2007) all brought Slim major success and his new album, *No Paid Holidays*, is certain to follow suit.

His three bandmates, the Workers, are all seasoned veterans of the road with artists from Bo Diddley to Hubert Sumlin. Expect top-class Mississippi Delta-style blues with a lyrical twist.

ON THURSDAY next week, The Cluny has the only UK date for the foundation-threatening, hell-raising Th' Legendary Shack Shakers. The Nashville band, fronted by the



BLUES VETERANS - Watermelon Slim & the Workers

vocals/harmonica of Col Joshua D Wilkes, present a molten alloy of polka/punk, blues/hillbilly and country-rock. Their five albums, from *Hunkerdown* (1998) to last year's *Swampblood*, can't really convey the band's live show. Several wide-eyed (with fear as much as wonder) critics have tried to define the band's sound, with the Guardian deciding on "a non-stop riot of blitzkreiging bandances, meltdown polkas and black-hearted blues". The Mirror, in bestowing them with album of the week, said it the record was "a howling-at-the-moon mini-masterpiece". Nail down everything that's loose and leave grandma at home.

TOMORROW'S free Yard Dog event at the Tyne Bar starts at 1pm and runs through until late. The line-up includes the Austin, Texas AJ (western swing), Ratty & the Shotkickers (Rockabilly), Staggering Jon Lee & His Lo-Life Drifter, Shipcote & Friends, Caroline Mary, mark Berserk and Jack Wilkinson. The day is likely to include further guests/surprises!

ON SUNDAY, as part of the SummerTyne festival, there is a Bob Marley tribute concert at The Sage. Janet Kay, remembered for her *Silly Games No 1* single, leads the charge. Ex-Cimarons singer Winston Reedy - a big success in Sounds 2007 - is a big success.

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