Music review: Watermelon Slim's newest album a musical treasure

By Doug Hill

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NORMAN — Album name: Bull Goose Rooster (2013, NorthernBlues Music)

Musician: Watermelon Slim and the Workers

Why you should listen: William P. Homans aka Watermelon Slim would be an unforgettable character even if he had never sung a single song. Vietnam War veteran and protester of same, dirt farmer, enthusiastic scholar with a graduate degree and long haul trucker, Slim has a genuine lust for life.

Fortunately for us all he has been sharing his personal vision of those varied experiences through songs for decades. Longtime associate Chris "Wick" Hardwick has produced Watermelon Slim's 11th album just in time to celebrate the blues man's 40-year anniversary of recording music.

Slim has always had an affection for and curiosity about nature. An anecdote he told years ago involved tube fishing in an Oklahoma farm pond and feeling a big old cottonmouth water snake come up to the surface from between his legs. His physically harmless encounter with the aquatic pit viper left an indelible psychological impression nonetheless. The title track of this disc memorializes another animal that Slim became familiar with at some point. It's just like the imaginative songwriter, attributing human motivations to a "Bull Goose Rooster" and in turn projecting some of Mr. Leghorn's feisty traits on him.

Slim's all-star Okie band the Workers includes Michael Newberry on drums, bassist Cliff Belcher, guitarist Ike Lamb and Ronnie "Mac" McMullen on guitars. One of the highlights is these gents covering Woody Guthrie's "Vigilante Man." Never one to eschew what might be unpopular controversy, Slim's liner notes dedicate the album to the "...Whistleblowers of America" and in particular U.S. Army private Bradley Manning. Not coincidentally, track seven titled "Prison Walls" is the bluest of these Watermelon Slim blues songs. "There aint no women here in hell/ Only pictures on the wall of my cell," he wails.

This new Watermelon Slim album is musical treasure from a man with extraordinary insight and wealth of knowledge.