

Slim Pickin's

Four decades into his career, it's hard to decide what's more interesting: Watermelon Slim or the man's music. **by KENNA BURIMA**

bluesman Bill Homans, a.k.a. Watermelon Slim, is well known for having one of the most interesting biographies in blues history, but it's his music steeped in the traditions of the Mississippi Delta that has won him accolades around the world. He's presently on a solo tour of Russia and Turkey, but Homans wasn't so sure about going on the road alone, particularly in such volatile countries. While he was busy enjoying the last Watermelon Slim and the Workers gigs of the year on the Legendary Blues Cruise out of San Diego, suicide bombings and an armed conflict in Diyarbakir, Turkey—one of his stops on the tour—made Homans think twice about his plans.

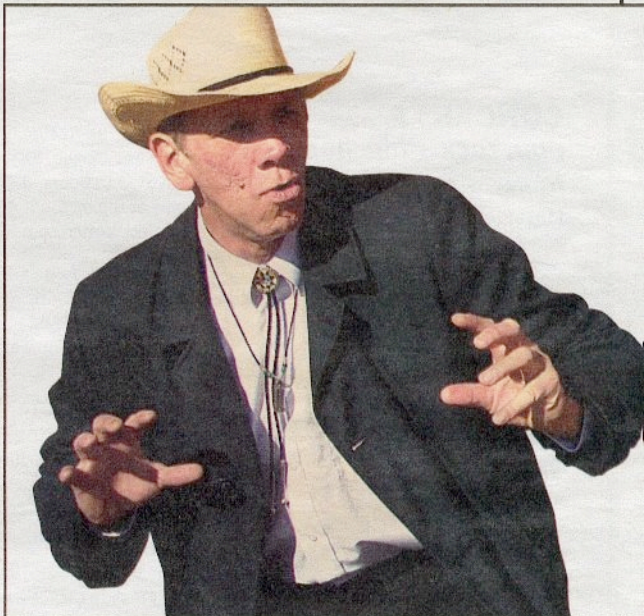
"I really tried hard not to do the tour," admits Homans. "But as I found out when I arrived, a great deal of economic activity depended on my appearance. I must say I felt very pressured. And the Russian part was thrown in months after I first agreed to do the tour, and after the events in Georgia. I did not want to go there."

Aside from language barriers, things have worked out for the most part, and Homans will be heading back to the States after his show in Calgary. And while he'll be returning to a country whose political landscape has changed drastically while he's been gone, Homans is waiting to see if things will in fact change.

"There is certainly hope that the election of Obama will make a difference in American foreign policy," he says. "But as with myself, Turks and Russians—and I was in Moscow on election eve, so there was much talk about the matter—are agnostic about it. We'll believe it when we see it. Obama is, after all, a supposed progressive Democrat whose mission, at the bottom line, is, like Franklin D. Roosevelt's, to save capitalism."

Unfortunately, years of strenuous touring combined with Homans' love of truck driving have added up to a serious case of arthritis. Therefore, this may be one of your last chances to catch him live.

"My arthritis, certainly helped along by the long distances I have driven for decades, has become so bad that the chiropractors have strongly urged me to retire from such work," says Homans. "I've done my share, way more than my share. Retirement time looms."



Watermelon Slim performs Friday, Dec. 5 as a part of the Carma Acoustic Blues Series. At the Engineered Air Theatre, Epcor Centre for the Performing Arts, 205 8th Ave. S.E. 8 p.m. epcorcentre.org.