

Featured Blues Interview - Watermelon Slim



Bill "Watermelon Slim" Homans has always stood on his own, as a truck driver, a soldier, an artist and musician and most of all as a man. An interesting man beyond what many of us know, we hope this chat exposes you to some of the depth of character and style of the man.

Blues Blast: I take it you have settled into the life of a Mississippi Gentleman very nicely. How are you doing?

Watermelon Slim: I'm doing well, the first six months were very good and I'm enjoying kicking back and doing some other things. Three days of fishing at Lake Pontchartrain (one good, one fair and one really bad one) but I

got the freezer full of Red Fish and boy are they good. Love to bake and stuff them up when, hoping the fall sets up good so I can get some bass and leave that head on to improve the flavor, not all fish mind you – but it also makes a great presentation.

BB: How's the garden coming ?

WS: Iffy season, the peppers and tomatoes wont fill the larder, cilantro didn't make it. Got a few Watermelons on the hill. Since I was traveling so much it didn't get the care I needed to give it. Come winter, after I turn it over and get it ready, it should be in great shape.

I do love it down here, been here since October 2009, and have been steadily been doing improvements, got the dog penned but he is an extremely intelligent escape artist, I need to either get him on a reality show, or take him to the army for the special forces !

BB: [Okiesippi Blues](#) is your current release with James 'Super Chikan' Johnson, that must have been fun to do.

WS: We made the record in December 2007, at Royal Studios in Memphis, the late Pops Mitchell was part of that production team along with his son and Charley Burch as co-producers (I was the producer) . Definitely a humorous, back in the country blues with a certain consciousness to it. It's off the beaten path from what you usually hear but it is absolutely Mississippi Blues. I put a couple of surprises on it myself. On one track I returned to the Kalimba, the African thumb piano, I synthesized various styles of music into one track by calling upon a Beatles tune and a Zimbabwe folk melody. It is really quite nice.

BB: You have always ventured outside the 'boundaries' of what are the accepted forms of music. One just needs to look at *'Ringers'* and *'Escape From The Chicken Coop'* as prime examples of this spirit.

WS: I am glad that you mentioned that. I am moderately disappointed that those two releases



that I did in Nashville have been summarily rejected by the powers that be in country music – they won't review them so hence nobody buys them. I just want to say that these two releases are some of the best country music as you will ever hear, this is not just country music but country music from Watermelon Slim. I grew up with country music and lived and heard that since the 1950's along with the Blues - it's part of my roots too.



BB: They were recorded with some of the best musicians in Nashville correct ?

WS: Yes, these were the best of the very best of the Nashville musicians. Produced by Miles Wilkinson who really knows how to let an artist's artistry come through in the music. I have not made better records than these two. *'Escape From the Chicken Coop'* is such a part of me, I was a trucker for so many years as most people know.

BB: Any idea why this reaction?

WS: I don't know, I haven't gone that deep into it. Maybe they think that this old boy is just too far out there for them and the audience. I know that some of the feedback from reviewers was along the lines of 'we'll pass on this - it's too Blues to be Country and too Country to be Blues' . . . come on it's still good music, has no one ever crossed genres before?

BB: Maybe you are just too far out there for the average listener?

WS: Well I have been a political activist for over forty years. Not only am I a truck-driving, blues-singing, grunt worker and musician by vocation but a staunch anti-war veteran/activist. This dates back to 1971 when I joined Vietnam Veterans against the War. I was honorably discharged, but deemed unsuitable for military service. I was a good soldier – I followed orders and was fine while doing what I needed to do, but it was when I was not busy with these tasks that I got into trouble. I naively considered my off time my own, (we laugh) so it certainly got me into lots of deep stuff. I am a much better soldier now, I am one that you would want in your foxhole now as many can attest to.



BB: I especially like your “Honor the Warrior, not the War' slogan and way of viewing things. It finally seems to have come to a state of recognition in today's constant war theatre that we see.

WS: That's the nut of it all, I am glad that so many more people have come to that realization. My family has a long and illustrious history of serving the country. It was just a matter of when and where. But then again I was 19 going on 16 back then, I really had no job skills so it was into the military I went.

BB: So how did you get from there to here – to this place where you have been for the past forty years?

WS: My job in the military was really pretty boring, I was a heavy equipment operator.

Basically setting up communications on trucks and such. Occasionally I'd go off base to remote signal sites but was basically combat support. It was really boring when I wasn't working, so my buddies and I would smoke all the dope we could and occasionally dropping LSD, but I did learn to play guitar there.



BB: Do tell....

WS: It started when I got sick I was in Cam Rhan Bay and started to learn how to play slide guitar there. It was an old beat up thing that was a god send to me at that point. I had other agendas in my life while a soldier and that's not a good thing, one needs to be solely focused on being a soldier and nothing else. I was exposed to Agent Orange while in service and that stuff messes with your system in so many ways. I am fortunate to have had one beautiful child and she is fine so I feel I dodged that bullet, and my health is generally good.

BB: So can I ask if The Workers are still part of the picture?

WS: Not at the moment. We are now living in three different places, Cliff and Ronnie are still in Norman, Oklahoma. Stovall is in Boston, and I'm in Mississippi - it's really too unwieldy to do the schedule that we did for the two years before. Even in

'09 with us all living in Oklahoma and Stovall-Brown in Boston it got to be too much. We might record another record and come back in '012, but the travel is just too rough at this point. Logistically it's a nightmare and with the airline fees.

From what I know the boys are taking care of themselves, especially Stovall he is a master at taking care of himself, way beyond what I can imagine myself ever being.

My 2012 schedule at this point is from March 17th to April 7th I will be in England, around the bottom two-thirds of England. I expect to be doing a n extended tour in Italy for the summer (as he rattles off some Italian phrases – stating that he has been studying Italian in preparation for the tour). You can always check my site for updates

<http://www.watermelonslim.com/tourcalendar.asp>.

BB: If I can back-track to Chikan and you for a moment, any plans on getting together again with him either in studio or on the road?

WS: Yes, there are things we are working on. I have to say that Super Chikan is one of the most distinctive Blues-men around these days. We plan on playing together more and thrilled at how our '[Okiesippi Blues](#)' release is being received.

If I may I just want to say how grateful I am to all the fans that I have had that made me go from being musically nothing to be able to talk about and make music in the last seven or so years. I quit my truck driving job and within three months I had a W.C. Handy Award nomination. It has worked seamlessly because of the fans and my entire team. I cannot thank them enough, it means the world to me.

Interviewer Chefjimi Patricola is a classically trained chef, blues loving writer and photographer, and creative master of [Blues411.com](#). He can also can be found on FaceBook and at festivals and clubs in your neighborhood and town.