



10 things
I love about you



CLICK HERE to
learn more about
Chevrolet's Top 10
under \$20,000

TORONTO STAR

www.thestar.com

Sounds like a world of hurt

**Watermelon Slim had hard-road life
Sonny Landreth, post-hurricanes**

Apr. 6, 2006. 01:00 AM

GREG QUILL

ENTERTAINMENT COLUMNIST

Oklahoma City-based bluesman Watermelon Slim opened the first show of his eastern Canada mini-tour last week in Fredericton, N.B., with "Taps" on solo harmonica.

He first called the bar-room multitude to attention "in a respectful but authoritative manner" that he recalls from his years as a Marine in Vietnam. He did it was as much to pay his respects to Pte. Robert Costall, Canada's first combat casualty in Afghanistan, as it was to pay tribute to a country that allows its people to mourn the loss of its soldiers.

"In my country, folks aren't allowed to see soldiers coming home in coffins and body bags," said the 57-year-old guitarist, singer and songwriter, who debuts Saturday night at the Silver Dollar Room. "It's very gratifying to be in a country that lets its citizens see the truth and to express their grief," he added.

Not that Watermelon Slim — a.k.a. Bill Homans, "just Slim" to his friends — is in favour of America's war in Iraq or of the foreign policy of his nation's president.

This is an old, embittered soldier talking, a grunt who taught himself to play on a \$5 balsawood instrument using his Zippo lighter as a slide while recuperating from battle wounds in a field hospital. On his return to Boston, Homans became a self-confessed "hyperactive protester," running afoul of the law on behalf of Veterans Against the War. He recorded an album of original anti-war songs — *Merry Airbrakes*, the first protest album recorded by a Vietnam veteran. It survives only as a \$1,000 collectors' item on eBay — from which rabble-rousing 1970s country-folk star Country Joe McDonald culled one song to record on his own "best of" collection.

"Canadian soldiers are in Afghanistan for the most patriotic and positive reasons," Homans continued. "They think they're defending their country, like Americans did in Vietnam. I hope the new government here will be a little more cautious about committing them to further American adventures in Iraq or, God forbid, Iran."

Homans has an impressive background — former field hand, long-haul trucker, journalist, teacher, conspiracy investigator and, in his own words, "budding career criminal." His sudden passion for Canada and Canadians is further strengthened by



Watermelon Slim and the Workers make their Canadian debut Saturday.

What's On Listings

[Attractions](#)

[Clubs](#)

[Comedy](#)

[Concerts](#)

[DVD Releases](#)

[Events](#)

[Galleries](#)

[Movies](#)

[On Stage](#)

[Salons & Soirees](#)

Network of roots

It's a big week for folk, ait.

country, blues and rootsy soul music in Toronto, with appearances by major artists all over the city. In addition to Watermelon Slim at the Silver Dollar and Sonny Landreth at Healey's on Saturday night, you might want to check out:

○ **Ron Sexsmith and Kathleen Edwards** Saturday at Massey Hall, Victoria and Shuter Sts. (\$24.50 at <http://www.masseyhall.com> or by phone at 416-872-4255).

Award-winning Toronto-based singer/songwriter Sexsmith makes his Massey Hall debut. His most recent album, *Destination Unknown*, an acoustic

his recent association with Toronto-based indie label Northern Blues Music. Label chief, Fred Litwin signed him on the strength of his performance at the W.C. Handy Awards in Memphis last year, when the singer was nominated as "best new artist" in the famed American blues presentation gala for his low-on-the-radar live 2003 recording, *Up Close And Personal*.

"These guys have pulled out all the stops," explained Homans, who ratcheted up his part-time career in music after years of driving big rigs before losing his truck to the bank. In previous years, he also earned a Masters degree in journalism and history at the University of Oregon, and teaching credentials in Oklahoma.

"I'm not good at regular day jobs in offices," he confessed in a voice that sounds as if it had been dragged along a stretch of rough road.

"I'm too loud and raucous. And I don't go for dispassionate journalism, anyway. The only difference between a truck dispatcher and an editor is that one thinks he knows everything and the other is convinced he does."

He also tells of working with professional investigators gathering information and conducting surveillance missions on white supremacist groups after the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995.

Four years after suffering a near-fatal heart attack in Paris while backing Champion Jack Dupree on harmonica, and nearly 28 years after he was dismissed by the record industry and compelled to pursue "other agendas" — all the time keeping his music alive on the side — Homans is suddenly blazing a trail as "the coolest new name in blues," according to his publicity blurb.

That praise is double-barrelled. It recognizes his colourful back story, which includes a stormy, now concluded 15-year marriage to blues bassist and composer Honour Havoc.

And it addresses the tough and honest music he makes on his new, self-titled CD with his band, The Workers — guitarist Ike Lamb, bassist Cliff Belcher and drummer Michael Newberry, who, Homans said, "had border issues" with Canadian immigration officials last week and has been replaced for the Canadian dates by award-winning Toronto drummer and blues singer Maureen Brown.

"I'm a late bloomer. Suddenly I have a great band, a great label, a great management team, and a great agent. I'm talking long distance every night with (legendary American blues and R&B producer) Jerry Wexler, who says he can't take my new CD off his player and wants to swap dirty stories with me. And I'm almost making a living from music, at age 57.

"As Carl Jung used to say, 'The universe has lined up, as it will' — this time for me."

After The Storms: Louisiana slide guitar master Sonny Landreth, the headliner Saturday night at Healey's, is still reeling from the aftershocks of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. They somehow spared his hometown, Lafayette, while laying waste to Gulf Coast communities just to the south and east.

collaboration with long-time bandmate Don Kerr, adds to a body of quality work that's unequalled in contemporary Canadian music in originality and musical daring. His songs, spread over seven albums released since 1995, have earned Sexmith international acclaim, most notably from Paul McCartney, Elvis Costello and John Hiatt.

○
James Hunter on April 12, 9 p.m., at Supermarket, 268 Augusta Ave. (\$15 at <http://www.ticketweb.ca>).

Blue-eyed, British R&B singer Hunter, 43, described as a cross between a rough-edged Bobby Darin, Sam Cooke and Ben E. King, makes his Canadian debut at Kensington Market boite, promoting his critically acclaimed Rounder Records album, *People Gonna Talk*. He's best known as a backup singer to Van Morrison in the '90s, who calls him "one of the best voices and best-kept secrets in British R&B and soul." He brings a great band, featuring Damian Hand and Lee Badau on saxes.

○
Shawn Mullins with Clay Cook on April 10, 9:30 p.m., The Horseshoe Tavern, 368 Queen St. W. (\$15.00

<http://www.ticketmaster.com> or by phone at 416-870-8000, Rotate This and Soundscapes, \$18 at the door). Atlanta-based Mullins, who had a U.S. radio hit in 1998 with the catchy spoken word-rock novelty "Lullaby," has taken a new tack with his latest Vanguard Records release, *9th Ward Pickin' Parlor*, a set of 13 original songs that sit squarely in alt.country territory and resonate with traditional folk sounds and instrumentation.

○
Josh Ritter Saturday, 8 p.m., The Mod Club, 772 College St. (\$15 at <http://www.ticketmaster.com> or by phone at 416-870-8000). The critically favoured, Idaho-based new folkie developed a cult following with two indie releases, *The Golden Age Of Radio* and *Hello, Starling*, and followed up with the recent release *The Animal Years*, a stylish, pop-edged production that's made Ritter a star in Europe.

Greg Quill

"We're okay, but you see heartbreak every day as well as hope," he said on the phone this week. "It amazes me how the people of New Orleans have pulled together, particularly musicians and artists, to get back something of what they had.

"Culture isn't old buildings and streets, it's people and traditions, and the eyes of the world are on New Orleans ... there's a lot of pressure to make sure the culture is restored properly and things are done right."

Landreth, 55, cut his chops there with Zydeco king Clifton Chenier before his guitar skills came to the attention of John Hiatt, Mark Knopfler, Dolly Parton, Jerry Douglas, John Mayall and Jimmy Buffett, among others.

But he doesn't get home much, touring to promote his 2005 live CD *Grant Street* with bassist David Ranson and drummer Kevin Blevins — the same crew he's bringing to Healey's.

His next recording will likely be an all-instrumental effort, "maybe with some of my heroes who have become my friends along the way.

"Playing live keeps me open, keeps bringing me back to the magic that inspired me in the first place," he said.

"All the songs on this album have evolved since their time in the studio. They've taken on another life. And I'd like to see how far that process can take me."

[Additional articles by Greg Quill](#)



[Click here for copyright permissions](#)

[Get great home delivery subscription deals here!](#)

[FAQs](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Webmaster](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [My Subscription](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [Webmaking Blog](#)

[Home](#) | [GTA](#) | [Business](#) | [Waymoresports](#) | [A&E](#) | [Life](#)

Legal Notice: Copyright Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. All rights reserved. Distribution, transmission or republication of any material from www.thestar.com is strictly prohibited without the prior written permission of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. For information please contact us using our [webmaster form](#). www.thestar.com online since 1996.