



"I may be a toothless, 64 year old bluesman, but I put on a hell of a show," Bill Homans declares. He ain't just woofin'. As Watermelon Slim, Homans comes across badder than a junkyard dawg, snapping at the end of a chain that barely restrains him from taking a few chunks outta your ass.

The title cut from his latest on the NorthernBlues Music label sets the tone. Channeling Dave Dudley, Slim is the cock of the walk, big and bold, strutting around ruffling feathers, preening for his competition. Slim says the song is based on a territorial rooster in Key West who dominates the post office parking lot there.

"If I could do my job half as good as him/they'd have to call me Watermelon Rooster Slim," the singer/guitarist proclaims, punctuating his remarks with some hackle-raising slide work. Slim turns in a performance on Slim Harpo's "Scratch My Back" that's somewhere between Sleepy La Beef and Little Walter, a place where Louisiana backwater guitar converges with uptown Chicago harp for a boiling blues stew. He tackles Harpo's "I'm a King Bee" as well, sneaking up on you with that Sleepy voice then stinging lustily with his harp like the head of the royal hive.

"Blue Freightliner" melds a Mississippi hill country drone vocal with a blistering slide as Slim hurtles his big rig down the road, tires screaming.

"The Foreign Policy Blues" is not Slim's first turn at protest music. The guitarist/vocalist/harpist is proud of his activist status. "I've fought in a war and against a war," he says of his service as a Vietnam vet and his subsequent time protesting in Vietnam Vets Against the War. The "Furrin' Policy Blues," as Slim pronounces it, denounces Bush and his Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, promising them "you're gonna have to reap just what you sow," jabbing at them with his greasy slide.

Slim goes uphill again for "I Ain't Whistling Dixie," sliding over the North Mississippi terrain like Luther Dickinson jacked up on a pot of Cuban coffee.

You can't put Slim in a box- he'd kick it to pieces in seconds. He's a fence jumper as well, so that's out too. A free ranging Slim is the only way to keep this Watermelon rooster fresh and tasty. Turn him loose and enjoy.

By Grant Britt