

Fourth in the line up for the Flatland Blues Festival this weekend in Russell is Watermelon Slim and The Workers. Watermelon Slim is considered one of the hottest and coolest new names in the blues and he has the standing ovations everywhere he goes to prove it.

Bill Homans (a.k.a. Watermelon Slim) is a Vietnam vet with a master's degree (in History from Oklahoma State University), two failed marriages, and years of experience as a watermelon farmer and a trucker. He played his first paid gig at 18 and spent more than 30 plus years as a musician, but only in the last few years has been officially recognized as a seasoned newcomer and one of the most exciting and legitimate contemporary blues artists. In 2002 Slim suffered a near fatal heart attack, and his brush with death gave him a new perspective on mortality, direction and life ambitions. His southern-style, blue-collar approach to the blues has met with resounding reaction from newfound fans, critics, promoters and the grass roots blues scene across the country. Slim has found his calling.

The Workers include Michael Newberry (drums), Ike Lamb (guitars), Cliff Belcher (bass) and Mr. Slim himself on slide guitar and dobro (and harp) along with Dennis Borycki on piano making a powerful unit on their latest CD. Together they put a new angle on old blues.

Watermelon Slim's delivery has been described as gruff and gnarled. He leads the Workers through the musical terrain of jump, boogie, Delta, Texas, zydeco and Chicago style blues.

Of Slim's latest CD, Michael Kinsman of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* says, "This is not contrived or wannabe blues - it's a college-educated, Vietnam War veteran who has been chronically underemployed and under-recognized expressing his feelings in the truest and most direct way he knows. Every nuance of his music is authentic, from his song about Mack trucks to one about the lacking of folding bills to his fateful ride in the devil's Cadillac."

In addition to Watermelon Slim, other performers at Saturday's Flatland Blues Festival include. Queen Bey, Lemuel Sheppard, Cephas and Wiggins, Anthony Gomes and Shemekia Copeland.

The festival begins with a "Blues and Bluegrass" jam session starting at 1:00 pm and closes with a free "Bagels and Blues" gospel service and brunch on Sunday starting at 10:00 am. All events take place at Memorial Park and County Fair Grasslands in Russell. Tickets are available at reduced rates in advance at locations in Russell, Great Bend, Hutchinson, McPherson, Salina, Wichita and Hays and on-line. Go to [www.flatlandblues.com](http://www.flatlandblues.com) for more information.