

# SLIM CHANCE

Lynwood Slim promises no more bar fights, just fine music – the real deal.

- By Sam Fell -

Back in the day, when the blues was spawned in cotton fields and on chain gangs, from jook joints and front porches, it was a black man's music. It was melancholy and vibrant, it was heartfelt and joyous, it was the blues, and it came from the heart of a repressed people and brought them to the fore. Over the course of time, the white man got onto the wagon, and since then, the blues has spread the world over, spawning its own offshoots, still retaining the heart and the soul but being represented by so many more.

As time went on and the swinging '60s came to be, the blues thread was picked up by even more, including a good many white artists, and today sees those white artists being lauded as masters themselves, taking this music and making it their own, sharing it with its originators and people everywhere. Lynwood Slim is one of these white cats whose life has been steeped in the tradition of the blues. Born Richard Duran in 1953, Lynwood Slim has gone on to become one of the finest harmonica players and vocalists in the music today, a musical connoisseur who's lived the life and continues to do so 'til this day.

When I get a chance to catch up with this particular Slim – a common moniker within the blues to be sure – he's at home in Los Angeles, the city where he cut his teeth before relocating to Minneapolis for twenty years, returning home in the late '90s. To say this is a man who loves life to the full would be an understatement indeed. It's only been a couple of years since he was last in Australia; he asks me what the Melbourne scene is like these days and I tell him it's rockin', it's vibrant, it's great... all it needs is some Lynwood Slim.

"Oh we're comin' man," he laughs heartily. "I'm bringin' some great guys with me too, including Big Joe Louis from England, we're really lookin' forward to this, I think it's gonna be a great tour." He tells me the scene in LA is lacking, and so he makes most of his money touring places like Australia and Europe. "Yeah, the music scene has gotten worse here in the

States," he laments. "Just with the discos and rap music, the drunk driving laws, people can't smoke cigarettes inside anymore, the whole social outlook has changed. An anthropologist, I don't know what he would say about it, but the blues is becoming like Dixieland here in the States; an American art form, but it's being pushed aside."

This is a sad state of affairs indeed, but it's people like Lynwood Slim who are still out there as bluesmen, still playing the blues, which is a blessing to be sure. Lynwood almost never came to be, as in his youth he played the trumpet and was a bit of a pool shark, almost going professional at one point. But, as seems to happen, one day he heard Jimmy Reed and Little Walter, and his future was sealed. Over his time in the industry, Slim has played on dozens of records, including six of his own, the last of which was *Last Call* (06).

"Yeah, I was listening to that last night as I drove home from my girlfriend's house," he tells me. "That's a good record, it stands up. And yeah, with that one, I was trying to move over to the cocktail jazz thing a bit, playing smoother blues, and I wanted to record some older songs, older standards that nobody does anymore." Slim got the jazz bug from his father, who would take him to jazz gigs before he was even ten years old, and it seems to have stuck. *Last Call* is indeed smooth, definitely jazz influenced, and unmistakably, Lynwood Slim. It sees him, and the musicians he plays with, in a different league, a league inhabited by very few.

"The guitar players I work with, they're fine musicians, not good guitar players, but *fine* musicians," he says, having just



ranted about how with a lot of guitarists these days, it's like guitar masturbation. "They know their shit, they don't need to jump up there and show off, they impress everybody with their skill. So that's where it's at, that's where I'm at, that's what I like to do."

"When I was in my twenties, I used to jump up on stage drunk 'n' shit," he laughs at the memory (or lack thereof). "But I can't do that no more, no more bar fights, our music now is the real thing, that's what we do."

Fine music – fine blues – is indeed where Lynwood Slim is at, and this certainly bodes well for the future of the blues.

**Lynwood Slim & The Real Deal play the Great Southern Blues & Rockabilly Festival on Sunday August 30. Last Call is available on Delta Groove through Only Blues Music.**