

Gut-bucket nitty-gritty music

By Robert Richardson
Senior Reporter

Magic Slim and the Teardrops play the blues

Magic Slim sat at the bar, cowboy hat and wingtips intact, while his band, the Teardrops, began to play.

He was busy watching the Chicago Cubs play the Atlanta Braves as he sipped and sometimes shot his Wild Turkey. Suddenly, a wild guitar riff jumped Slim's attention to the stage. He smiled and gave an approving nod, then went back to the baseball game.

Slim may be a Zoo Bar regular, but not on a bar stool. When Slim comes to town, he usually stands in the bar and on the stage, guitar in hand. He is the mentor of the blues band Magic Slim and the Teardrops.

"I've been involved with the blues practically all my life, ever since I been old enough to know what the blues was all about," he said. "I been trying to play the blues and I'm still trying to play it."

Slim and his band have been playing

at the Zoo Bar, 136 N. 14th St., since Monday and will continue their gig tonight through Saturday.

By himself, Magic Slim is a towering 6 foot 7 inches. His belly has become an armrest; his manner, simply fun. But when the man — originally from the South Side of Chicago — takes the stage guitar in hand, he is as intimidating as a tornado in a trailer park.

Slim's soft touch and fast fingers coax the music out of the guitar. He is a snake charmer — smooth and accurate — and he knows his music.

Larry Boehmer, owner of the Zoo Bar, first brought Magic Slim to Nebraska in January 1975. Boehmer said it was Slim's first trip to Nebraska and

probably his first out of the ghetto.

Boehmer said Slim's personality helps draw people to see him in Lincoln, but maintained that there was something more important in Slim's possession.

"He's got a real strong sense of rhythm that's really a down gut-bucket nitty-gritty kind of blues," Boehmer said. "Everything's pretty drivin' with Slim. I think people like that, especially people that haven't listened to a lot of blues. They're more familiar with rock 'n' roll. This is a little more like it."

"Let Me Love You, Baby" was a intense illustration of Boehmer's thoughts. A hard-hitting drum, heavy bass, and two dueling guitars that chased each other all around the stage made most of Slim's songs a pleasure to listen

to. The fierce, concentrated music made the audience sweat as they listened.

Boehmer said that in the more than 16 years Slim has been coming to Lincoln, he never has had an off night.

"Sixteen and a half years he's playing here and still packs the joint," Boehmer said. "And he did pretty much from the ghet; he really did."

Slim didn't have to think twice about why people like to come see him play.

"Because they likes the way I play the blues because I get up there and do my job," Slim said. "And when I do my job I play what people like. And what I play — it touches them in the heart and they love it. That's why the bars be full whenever I play."

And the bar was full, both Monday

and Tuesday evening. Full of people screaming for Magic Slim and his band.

The three musicians who back up Slim: Michael Scott, drums; Nick Holt, bass; and John Primer, guitar, put on quite a show without the master.

Performing a hilarious rendition of a Glen Campbell hit, "Rhinstone Cowboy," the Teardrops took the audience on a joyride of good times and good music.

But all Slim had to do was leave his bar stool and walk to the stage and the Zoo Bar roof was raised.

Why did Slim choose the blues over some other profession?

He said it was natural to play the blues since he has lived them all his life. "My life has been hard ever since I

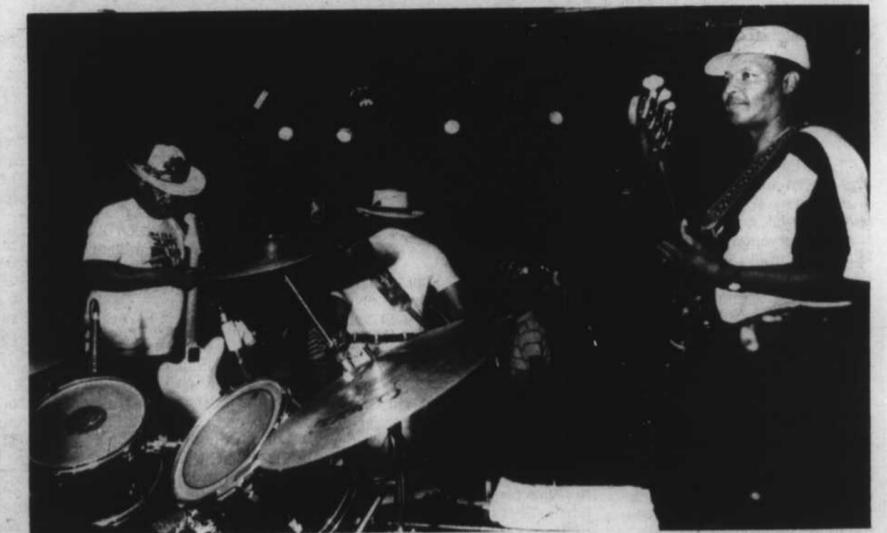
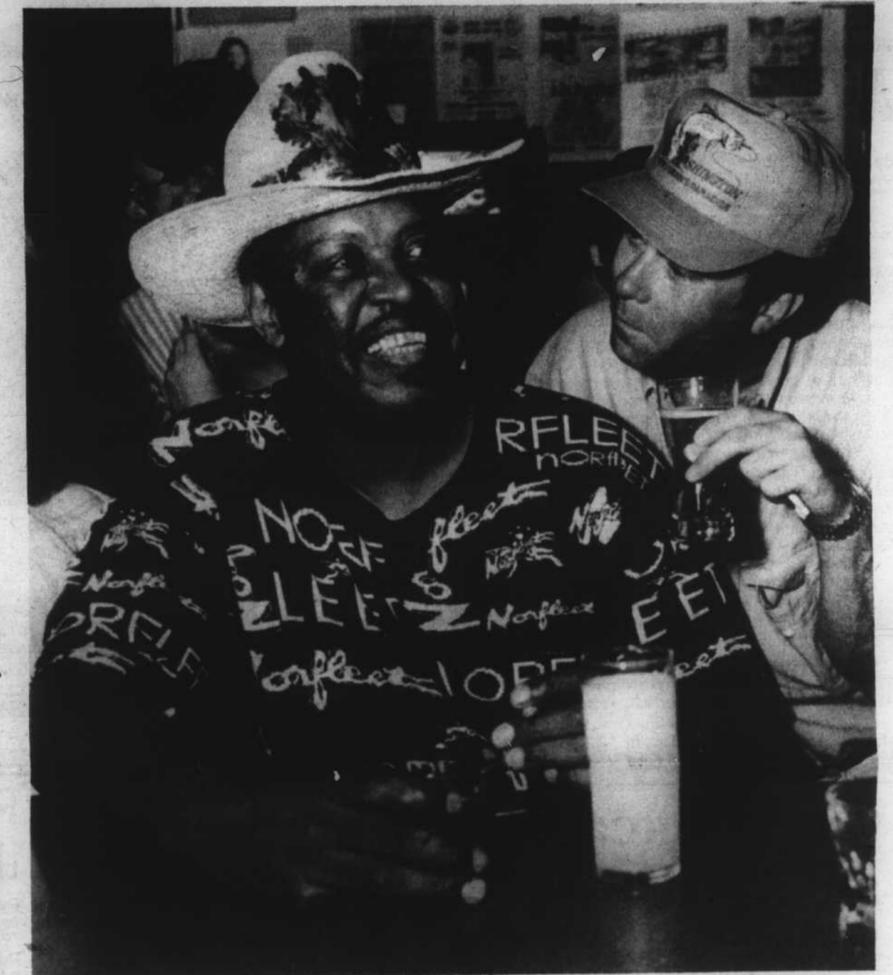
was a kid, sharecropping and all that, see," Slim said. "All we know to do is go the the field, chop cotton, or pick cotton, sing the blues and go back home. We don't know nothing else to do. It's a feelin', you know. You have to feel what you're doing."

Boehmer said that Slim is getting more popular all the time — but Lincolniters still will be seeing him in these parts.

"As long as Slim is playing — he'll be playing the Zoo Bar," Boehmer said.

It's no secret that Slim loves what he does, but how long is he willing to do it?

"I love it because this is me. This is where I really come from," Slim said. "I come from the blues and I'm going to play the blues until the day I die."



Clockwise from top left: Magic Slim rips some chords during a gig Tuesday night at the Zoo Bar. Magic Slim takes time out during the show to have a drink with a patron. The teardrops continue to play as Magic Slim prepares to head for the bar. John Primer of the Teardrops swings his guitar to the beat of the blues Monday night.

Photos by Shaun Sartin