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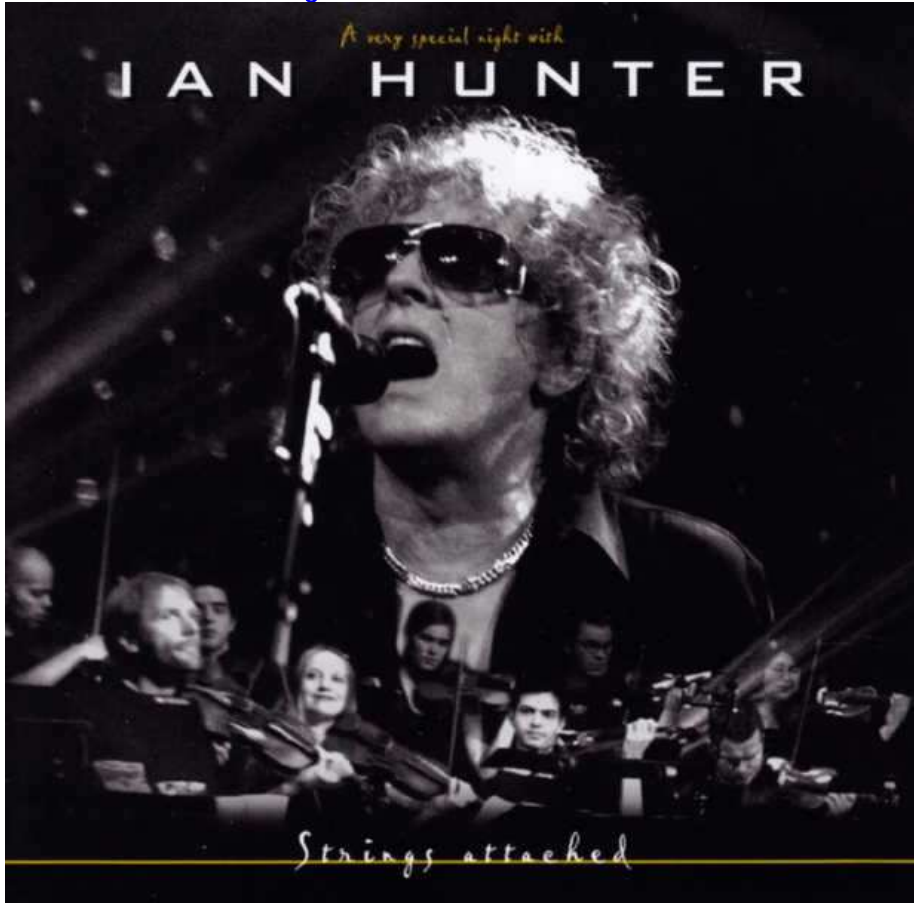
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R.I.P Johnny Winter, James Gang remembered and more

July 31, 2014

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Johnny Winter, legendary guitarist, died at age 70 on July 16 while touring in Europe. He was at a hotel in Zurich at the time, and no cause of death has officially been announced at this time. Fans of Winter might want to get 'True to the Blues: The Johnny Winter Story,' (Columbia/Legacy) is a phenomenal four-CD box set released/reviewed Feb. 28.

My second Pre-Punk Postscript of 2014 profiles the band that future solo artist and Eagle Joe Walsh emerged into national consciousness with, The James Gang. This is followed by reviews of a string-driven concert package from Ian Hunter and a classic-metal album from Hollywood Monsters.

Pre-Punk Postscript: The James Gang

There were early lineups of The James Gang in the mid-1960s, but they really got going in 1969, when guitarist/vocalist/songwriter Joe Walsh joined and they began recording with Bill Szymczyk. Bassist Dale Peters joined shortly after their "Yer Album" debut, completing the classic trio with founder/drummer Jim Fox.

In July 1970, the band released its second/best overall album "James Gang Rides Again," which included the popular single "Funk #49." In the spring of 1970, the band opened for The Who during a U.S. tour. Impressed guitarist Pete Townshend then invited them to open on The Who's fall tour of the United Kingdom. During their heyday, the Gang shared the stage with Grand Funk Railroad, Humble Pie, Three Dog Night and many others.

After two more albums, 1971's "Thirds" (featuring the hit "Walk Away") and "James Gang Live in Concert" released later that year, Walsh, tired of doing the lion's share of writing/singing and being the trio's lone melodic instrument, left the band in December 1971. The James Gang made a few more albums with different personnel before dissolving.

'Strings Attached,' Ian Hunter (Made In Germany, HHH 1/2)

This July 8 double-CD reveals what admirers of Mott The Hoople and Ian Hunter's solo career know: that many of their songs reveal deep wells of emotion, even when they rock. The slow songs really dig deep, and in this format of mostly acoustic band and string section, they're in the spotlight.

After a dirge-like opener and a disappointing version of "I Wish I Was Your Mother," thoughtful nuggets like "All of the Good Ones Are Taken," "Boy (Hunter/Ronson)," slightly hokey takes on Bowie's "All the Young Dudes" and "Once Bitten Twice Shy," plus a rocking "All the Way From Memphis" and "Saturday Gigs," which spotlights the strings. Things at this Oslo show drag at times, but Hunter/Mott fans will find lots to enjoy.

'Big Trouble,' Hollywood Monsters (Music Avenue/Mausoleum Records, HHH)

This July 8 CD is the brainchild of French expatriate vocalist/guitarist/composer Steph Honde, who has lived in California since 2012. Honde played in several successful French rock groups before relocating stateside. Once in Los Angeles, Steph befriended Tim Bogert (retired Vanilla Fudge/Cactus bassist), and convinced him to play on Steph's debut album. The Monsters line-up also includes keyboardist Don Airey (Deep Purple, Whitesnake) and drummer Vinnie Appice (Dio, Black Sabbath).

My favorite thing is the front cover, featuring a giant ape and T-Rex fighting atop the crumbling Capitol Records building. Other highlights include "Big Trouble," one of Bogert's three tracks (and Airey's one); and Honde's multi-instrumental ability. Classic metal fans will enjoy this album.

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