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Johnny Winter: Live Through the '80s

starring Johnny Winter

MVD Visuals

In the '80s we partied, but today we only curate as people like Johnny Winter are heading for the Rock Star Museum. We archive the dusty, blurry videos so those behind us remember; we banged our heads for them so they could bask in our coolness as they shove MP3s into their ear buds, bound to either go deaf or take an early handbasket to Hades. My God, I've become my grandfather!



Is anything really left to enlighten the next generation? Only this quaint DVD that preserves the VHS and 16-mm archives of those fuzzy, long-ago years. Johnny Winter was one of that core crowd of electric bluesmen that saturated the market in the early '70s and saved us from folk music. Winter grew up in Houston and heard the blues firsthand from Muddy Waters and B.B. King. Along with his brother, they played the blues with electric guitars, cut some teenaged records, and jumped onto the rock and roll explosion. Eventually Winter, like just about everyone, discovered heroin but survived the ordeal. By the middle of his career he was clean and at the top of his form, and video recording was

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Winter, Johnny - Live
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good enough to capture him on the live stage. That's what we have to offer Generation Z.

This footage is archival stuff shot at concerts in Ontario, Denmark, New Jersey, and points east. The image quality is middling to great, but the sound is typically sharp and exciting. The Roskilde, Denmark show is particularly invigorating. "Jumping Jack Flash" is well-lit, nicely mixed, and captures Johnny, his drummer, and about half the population of Denmark on the very verge of pogoing. Some of those blond boys went on to create Scandinavian Death Metal, and I think this concert may have pointed the way. There are some killer songs here -- "Johnny B. Goode," the Robin Trower flavored "Stranger," and the rockabilly anthem "Lights Out" all shine. What's missing are his big early hits like "Rock and Roll Hoochie Coo" or "No Time to Live." There are snippets of interviews, but this is basically concert footage plus a few promo tapes from his days with Alligator records. A fairly stoned interview pops up about halfway through, but the best part of that segment is the tour of his tattoo collection. Both Johnny and his brother Edgar are albino, and that makes for one eye-popping sleeve of ink. No special features here, just two hours of solid rock and roll by one of the best. The blues never sounds dated; I suspect these tracks might be just as moving in a century, even with their quaintly 1980's video technology and low grade CD quality sound.

Heck, we banged our heads for the future of all mankind. What a burden. I hope they appreciate all our partying. I know I did.

Johnny Winter: www.johnnywinter.net

Carl F Gauze

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